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LETTERS

TO THE

MEMBERS OF THE AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY,

ON THE

Tract Controversy,

BY THE

BOSTON SECRETARY.

LETTERS

TO THE

MEMBERS, PATRONS AND FRIENDS

OF THE

BRANCH AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY IN BOSTON,

INSTITUTED 1814;

AND TO THOSE OF THE

Anti-Slavery Society

NATIONAL SOCIETY IN NEW YORK,

INSTITUTED 1825.

BY THE

SECRETARY OF THE BOSTON SOCIETY.

BOSTON:

CROCKER AND BREWSTER.

NEW YORK:—CARTER AND BROTHERS.

1858.

*Slavery in the U.S.
1858, Boston*

TO THE READER.

IN issuing the second edition of these Letters, I deem it proper to state that they were written, published, and are circulated on my own individual responsibility, and at my own expense, except so far as the friends of the cause may be disposed to aid in the matter.

In the brief interval since the first edition was issued the author has received many letters from distinguished gentlemen, expressing their testimony to the value of these Letters. Some of these are prefixed to this edition for the gratification of numerous friends to the cause.

THE AUTHOR.

Boston, April 10, 1858.

FROM CHIEF JUSTICE SHEPLEY, MAINE.

Portland, March 30, 1858.

REV. SETH BLISS,—

MY DEAR SIR,—Your "Letters to the Members of the American Tract Society" have been read by me with much satisfaction.

Receiving, as I do, your statements respecting the origin, history and proceedings of the Society as correctly made, it appears to me, that your positions, the reasoning to sustain them, and the conclusions arrived at, are exhibited with great ability and clearness. They are too satisfactory and conclusive to be essentially affected by any other exposition founded upon fair statement and reasoning. Any one not thus founded is unsuitable to the cause and not worthy of consideration.

That the religious community should, at this time of our Lord's marvelous doings, refuse a calm and deliberate consideration and judgment, and yield itself to the control of self-will, prejudice, or passion, is too depressing and derogatory to the Christian character to be admitted.

I trust, therefore, that you will not have labored in vain.

Most respectfully,

ETHER SHEPLEY.

FROM HON. RUFUS CHOATE.

DEAR SIR,—I received from your publishers a few days since a copy of your Letters to the Members of the American Tract Society on the Tract controversy. If I am indebted to you for this kindness I beg to thank you for it.

In the interval of other occupations I have read them, and have considered the argument which they embody; and the considerations of a large expediency by which the proceedings of the Society as such have heretofore been conducted. That argument I deem unanswerable; and those considerations decisive. You have interpreted the Constitution fairly, justly and with an ability and force which from professional lips or a professional pen would be regarded as very high. Words, objects and a uniform contemporaneous practical construction, all support you. Of those considerations of fitness, nationality, honesty and honor on which the Society have acted and which you display, I do not well see how any lover of the Union, or any administrator of trust funds, in the existing state of feeling, can make complaint.

The more widely the Letters are circulated and the more they are read the better, certainly so when these days are over.

If any thing in them is much open to cavil it is what is written of the Special Committee; their powers and their resolutions. It will not protect you from this, but I say so because I think so, that your treatment of this topic is admirable. No authority as such enabled them to instruct the Publishing Committee; and their resolutions do not assume to do so. The exact and only course which the Constitution, the resolution by which the Special Committee were appointed, or the report itself of that Committee, allowed or required the Publishing Committee to pursue, they have pursued.

The charge of pusillanimity may well be endured, while the actual policy can be defended on such grounds of law, such a practise of the past, such a condition of public sentiment, and such views of christian wisdom and expediency as you have so clearly presented.

I am, Sir, your friend and obedient servant,

RUFUS CHOATE.

Boston, April 3, 1858.

FROM HON. ROBERT C. WINTHROP.

Boston, April 5, 1858.

MY DEAR SIR,—I thank you for the copy of your Letters which you have kindly sent to me. You have discussed the question relating to the publication of Anti-Slavery Essays by the American Tract Society with great thoroughness and ability, and have confirmed me in my long cherished opinion, that such publications do not rightfully enter into the province of the Society, and that they would be fatal at once to its unity and its usefulness.

I am, respectfully and truly, your friend and servant,

ROBERT C. WINTHROP.

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LETTER I.

CHRISTIAN BRETHERN AND FRIENDS,—In the course of Divine Providence, events have occurred, placing this Society in a position so perilous to its welfare as, in my judgment, to devolve on me the duty and responsibility of addressing to you these letters.

Our Constitution establishes three departments of officers, the Executive Committee, the Secretary, and Treasurer. All of these officers derive their authority equally from the Society. The Secretary takes part in the deliberations of the Committee, but does not vote. The Secretary and the Treasurer are expected to execute what the Committee decide to have done. The three departments are coördinate, and together they constitute its administrative power and efficiency. To each department are assigned specific duties and responsibilities. These are defined and limited by the Constitution, by the By-Laws, by custom and usage.

To the Secretary belongs the general correspondence, relating to the interests and operations of the Society. To him belong, also, the general supervision and watchful care of all its interests and business, and the duty of keeping the Committee informed of what has been done, and of what, in his judgment, should be done to promote its efficiency and welfare. Theirs is the responsibility of considering and deciding these questions.

Circumstances are such as seem to impose on me the duty of addressing you on matters requiring your serious attention. You need not be told that the unhappy controversy respecting slavery, which for four years has been crowded on the Society, has brought it into its present hazardous position. Most unfortunately for a *union* Society, which can live only in peace with itself, this outside strife has divided its members, friends and counsels, and on one of the most exciting topics of the day, inflamed by political, party, and sectional feelings

and prejudices, so that even good men are liable to have their judgment and charity unconsciously subjugated to their prejudices.

For twenty-five successive years you have elected me to an office, the duties of which must be executed in harmony with its organic law, and which the State has endowed with corporate powers. It is therefore my first duty, honestly, to understand the true meaning and intent of this law of our being and of my official duties. Having done this, I must take the responsibility of discharging these duties in harmony with the convictions of my judgment as to its meaning. If in this I err, you have the right and the power to correct my error.

Experience in the working of the Society, for a quarter of a century, does not enable me so to understand the requirements of the Constitution, as to concur in the opinion of some that it is lawful, expedient, or useful, to publish Tracts on Slavery, any more than on any other subject, further than evangelical Christians are agreed.

As this is solely a constitutional question, it seems necessary, as well as proper, that I should give you my views of the meaning, as I understand it, of this organic law, in its prohibitions and requirements. This I consider due to you, as well as to myself.

For thirty-two years this Society has sustained the relation of a Branch of the more National Society in New York. The Constitutions of both these Societies are alike in their fundamental articles, and substantially so in their detail. They have been so long honorably and harmoniously identified in the public mind in interest, object and operations, that whatever the National Society does affects this Society. The controversy has also been chiefly with that Society, and on the meaning of its Constitution. For these reasons I propose to give you my views as to the meaning of that Constitution and of the action of that Committee, and also my views of the Report of the Special Committee, with some of my reasons for these views. May not an officer of the Society, who should know as much as some others on this subject, speak what he thinks is true and right, and what all the friends of the Institution should know and consider, whatever be the consequences to himself. I cannot see its interests, and even existence imperilled, without one effort, weak though it may be, to preserve it in its integrity, and on its original basis, and for the one catholic object for which good men, now in Heaven, founded it. One generation, the rich and the poor, the child and the widow with her two mites and her prayers, have sustained it, and God, in his grace and compassion, has

richly blessed it with immeasurable and immortal fruits. I prefer not to involve the responsibility of any officer of the Society in my present attempt, but shall let the sole responsibility rest on myself.

We were founded a *Union Society*, and bound by a written Constitution, to preserve *that Union*; but alas, in an evil time, we are a *UNION* divided against *itself*, in our membership and patrons, in our counsels and agencies, and divided in the two latter because divided in the former. To the Members belong the power and the responsibility of restoring our Union, with its lost peace, confidence and prosperity. Let us seek this peace in Him, who with his cross in sight left this precious legacy, "My Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you": but how careful to say, "NOT AS THE WORLD GIVETH." Until this peace is restored, discord and strife, alienation and party heat must be the bitter fruits. The Society divided against itself, must, ere long, if the present discord is continued, inevitably fall, and many a heart will mourn and weep in secret over the melancholy result.

I ask your attention first, to the nature of our union benevolent Societies, and then to the history, organization, Constitution, and position of the American Tract Society. What has already been published relating to this subject has been chiefly on some one topic, and in fragmentary articles. It seems to me that, in order to a just and correct judgment of the present controversy, a more comprehensive and continuous view of the subject is needed, which its history, organization, Constitution, etc., affords. This I have attempted to do, and now submit the result to the candid consideration of the members, patrons and friends of both these Societies.

UNION SOCIETIES ANALOGOUS TO EACH OTHER IN THEIR CONSTITUTION AND DESIGN.

The American Bible Society has, by its constitution, prohibited itself from circulating the Bible with Notes and Comments. It would not and could not have been formed without this simple and comprehensive restriction of itself to the circulation of the Bible alone, with no human opinions annexed to the text.

The members and patrons of the Society receive the Bible as a divine revelation, and as the only perfect and infallible rule of faith and morals; but they differ in their interpretation of some passages of the book.

They differ in their interpretation of passages relating to doctrines,—ordinances, ecclesiastical order and government, and of some passages relating to piety and morality.

Yet, with these different individual opinions, they have united, to circulate over the world the entire book itself, without annexing to it their different opinions, while each denomination regards its own interpretation more or less important to piety and morality.

The Society is solemnly pledged, by its constitution, to each member and to the public, that it will not circulate the Bible with notes and comments of any individual party or denomination. This is its fundamental law. Whenever it violates this it must cease to exist.

The American Board of Commissioners conduct their missionary work on this principle of compromise. Congregationalists and New School Presbyterians are now the two component parties.

It is agreed that missionaries of both denominations may be employed, and on equal terms, and that the missionaries of each party may be directed by a common agency and sustained from a common fund at home. Each may establish churches among the heathen after the ecclesiastical pattern of his own order, and each may diffuse and defend their own peculiar denominational views as they may judge wise. But neither party can insist that only churches of its own order shall be established. They both receive the Bible as the revealed will of God, and agree in all of his will which each regards as essential to a knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the promotion of vital godliness and sound morality; while they so differ in the interpretation of some passages as to separate them into two distinct and different denominations. But, with these differences, they unite in a common work, that they may most effectually and extensively diffuse their common faith among the heathen.

The American Home Missionary Society was founded by the same parties and Reformed Dutch, and on this Christian principle of compromise and expediency. Without this it could not have been formed or continued to this day.

On this principle the American Sunday School Union, and the American and Foreign Christian Union, were founded, each for its specific work, and in which evangelical Christians are united to promote piety and morality in this and foreign lands.

The numerous "Young Men's Christian Associations," existing in all sections of our country, and composed of evangelical Christians, are based on the same principle.

In all these, their denominational differences and other controversies are excluded, for the sake of a higher end, and that by *harmony* in their *union*, they may labor, all together, on specific principles, for the advancement of the same specific end.

If either of these societies violate the fundamental principle of its constitution, by admitting to its counsels or labors, subjects or matters about which the parties in covenant with each other differ, their union must of necessity cease to exist.

AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY.

This Society is founded on the same principle. While it receives the Bible as the revealed Will of God, it has bound itself, by its Constitution, to circulate *only* such interpretations of the Bible as evangelical Christians are agreed in, and believe will extend a knowledge of Christ as the Redeemer of sinners, and will promote vital godliness and sound morality.

This compromise is not a denial of any portion of the will of God; nor does it weaken its authority, lessen its value, or restrict its diffusion or that of any moral truth which any good men think relates to vital godliness or sound morality.

By uniting in this Society, its members agree that it shall not be used to circulate those interpretations of his revealed will respecting doctrines, ordinances, forms of worship and morals, in which evangelical Christians are not agreed; nor to circulate those tracts in which they are agreed, unless they are judged, by the tribunal which it has created for this purpose, to be needed, and to be adapted to promote its main purpose.

Each party has full liberty to circulate its own private opinions, or those of others, respecting the divine will, outside of this Society, but it cannot use the Society for this purpose, except only so far as those opinions and interpretations are in harmony with those of all evangelical Christians.

The Society is not the whole body of Christ's disciples or his entire Church, and must not be confounded with it.

It was not designed nor has it obligated itself to disseminate the whole will of God relating to religion or to morals.

"It is a compromise. It is a partnership, entered into by such evangelical Christians as have chosen to become partners," not for *every* object, but for a *specific* object, carefully limited and defined." It implies and recognises differences of views as to what concerns the interests both "of vital godliness and sound morality," and it excludes from its sphere of operations all such differences.

WHY WAS THIS SOCIETY FORMED?

But why form a Society expressly for the one purpose stated in its Constitution? Is it not the main design of the Christian church to diffuse the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of sinners, and to promote the interest of vital godliness and sound morality? Is not every member under the highest obligation to do this? Why then form a Society, outside of the Church, for this purpose?

The men who founded the Society believed that the great body of evangelical Christians were agreed in all that truth which the Bible makes essential to vital godliness and salvation, and also in that which would promote sound morality, and they believed that by uniting to diffuse *that* truth, and by excluding from their issues their different interpretations of the Bible in which they were not harmonious, they could, more extensively, promote these important interests than if each should act only in his own church relations. They did not design, or agree, to circulate all that truth, or those opinions which some evangelical Christians might regard as divine truth, and related to vital godliness and sound morality.

In order to promote their one specific but comprehensive object, they must exclude all "questions of doubtful disputation," whether of politics, or of sectarian, or of sectional schemes of morality; and include only those subjects *so far as unitedly they could* promote this object. The founders believed that evangelical Christians had attained to the rule laid down by the Apostle, by which he exhorted the Church in every age to walk. "Whereunto ye have *already* attained let us walk by the same rule—let us *mind the same thing*." Hence they proceeded to embody this principle of union in the Constitution, and to make this its fundamental principle, and by it bind all, who should choose to unite and coöperate as partners, to walk by *this* rule, and mind the same things in promoting its object; just as the partners in a mercantile house must mind the contract, its terms, and the design of their partnership, and must regard their mutual compact, in conducting their joint concern.

The means which they covenanted to employ for their main object is the "*circulation*" of certain "religious tracts." This is so essential, as the means to this end, that their purpose could not be accomplished without it; for they covenanted to *diffuse* those truths in which they agreed. Without *circulation*, as the way by which it must diffuse, they could have had no motive in forming such a Society. Nor was there then any more need of such a Society than there is now; for then, as now, various ways, means and organizations existed for the circulation of all kinds of religious tracts, and on all controverted subjects which divide evangelical Christians.

I affirm, therefore, as an undeniable truth, that the AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY was formed with the design of excluding from its issues, all those topics, within the whole range of religious and moral truth, in which all evangelical Christians are not agreed—no matter what they are, doctrines, morals, ordinances, forms, baptism, or slavery.

This *fact* is *fundamental* and vital. This must be considered, in any true interpretation of its Constitution.

HISTORY OF ITS ORGANIZATION—PRELIMINARY MEASURES— CONVENTION CALLED—THE SOCIETY ORGANIZED.

The New York Religious Tract Society, with men of enterprise and liberality among its Managers, in the year 1824, was contemplating the speedy organization of a more comprehensively national Society. This Society, under the auspices of such men, believed that New York, as the commercial emporium, with a more extensive and increasing communication with the whole country than could be had from Boston, was the best location for such a Society. The Board of this Society, Dec. 1, 1824, through a Committee, proposed to the Executive Committee of the Boston Society, that that Society be moved to New York, and become this National Society. This proposal was received with much solicitude by the Boston Society, in a meeting which had been convened to act upon it, and was finally referred to the Executive Committee. After much consultation the proposal was declined, and for reasons I need not here state. Both of these Societies, together with many friends in all parts of the country, had come to feel the necessity of a more comprehensively national Society, which could furnish the local Tract Societies with such tracts as they wanted, and cheaper than each could publish its own, and in which

they all could unite in more extensive operations for supplying with religious truth the wide destitutions of a rapidly growing country, and especially in the Western and Southern States.

The correspondence and the discussions of the day shew that these were the motives which impelled this movement. Although the Constitution of the Boston Society, like those of many of the smaller Societies, was catholic in its character and design, its Executive officers up to this time were composed of Christians of one denomination. The records and correspondence of that Society shew its appreciation of the importance of the new Society.

Early in February its Committee sent its Assistant Secretary to confer with the Committee of the New York Board and other friends in reference to the new organization. They held almost daily meetings for prayer and consultation. In these meetings other officers of the New York Society and distinguished clergymen participated. The necessity of a house amply to accommodate the new Society was among the first measures agreed upon, and five of these gentlemen offered \$10,000 for that object. Success thus guaranteed, the next step was to prepare a Constitution and take measures for the organization of a National Society. In consultation with Rev. Drs. Milnor and Spring and with Rev. C. G. Sommers, who was the Secretary of the New York Society and had taken a deep interest from the first in this proposal, together with other eminent ministers and laymen, a Constitution was formed, and a public meeting held March 11th, for preliminary arrangements to the final organization of a National Society. At this meeting Col. Richard Varick presided; Rev. W. A. Hallock, Secretary. The subscription for a house was, at this meeting, raised to \$12,500, and soon afterwards increased to upwards of \$20,000, and by a subsequent effort to \$25,852 95.

The Society was temporarily organized by agreeing upon a Constitution and the choice of officers; and measures were taken for calling a Convention, to meet in New York on the 10th of May, to which body the whole matter was to be submitted for final revision and organization. For this interim of two months this preliminary organization was continued, but without taking any final action.

Letters were immediately addressed to the principal Tract Societies in the United States, inviting them to send delegates to meet in Convention May 10th, to organize such a Society.

The Convention assembled at the time appointed. There

were present in this Convention a respectable number of delegates from several Tract Societies in different parts of the country, and also ministers and Christians of different evangelical churches, who, with the advice and assistance of other gentlemen of high consideration from different sections, revised and agreed upon a Constitution to be submitted to a more public meeting on the following day, when the proceedings of the Convention were considered and sanctioned with a most delightful unanimity. The Constitution agreed to in the preliminary meeting in March, was adopted by the Convention, May 11th, and the Society was harmoniously organized. The only important amendment of the Constitution, made by the Convention, was in the last words of the first Article, by adopting the words "*all evangelical Christians,*" instead of the words "*evangelical Christians of all denominations.*" The reason for this change was so obvious that it gained the unanimous concurrence of the Convention, and was adopted with scarcely any discussion. This reason was, that they designed to form a more comprehensively catholic and National Society, to be composed, not of denominations or churches as such, nor of clergymen or laymen exclusively, but simply of evangelical Christians of every name and locality, the essence and substance of whose faith consists in the cordial belief of that fundamental doctrine of Christianity expressed in the first article of the Constitution, "*a knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of sinners.*"

The Constitution adopted by the Convention, is the same in its fundamental principles as that of the Boston Society, both being the same on which the Religious Tract Society in London was founded in 1799. In all these preliminary measures and in the organization, the Society in Boston sympathized and participated by the continuous labors and influence of its Secretary and by correspondence. The first Article as then adopted remains intact to this time.

THE CONSTITUTION IS NATIONAL AS WELL AS CATHOLIC IN ITS DESIGN AND SCOPE.

The first Article, which is the fundamental one, is as follows:

"ART. I. This Society shall be denominated the AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY, the object of which shall be to diffuse a knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of sin-

ners, and to promote the interests of vital godliness and sound morality, by the circulation of Religious Tracts, calculated to receive the approbation of all evangelical Christians."

The terms employed in this, to express the main design which it aimed to secure and perpetuate, and also the means adopted for this end, are carefully selected, and are simple and obvious in their meaning, and shew, that the founders, in their preliminary action, and also in the Convention which adopted the Constitution and organized it into a Society, designed it to be *National* in its character, design and operations, as well as *catholic*. The object which the Society is pledged to promote and the means it is pledged to employ for this, prove that they designed it to include, both in its membership and operations, our entire national domain, so far as this should be practicable. The terms in which its object is stated are so simple and intelligible, that it is difficult to see how a candid mind can fail to understand their meaning as they understood them, or can pervert their so obvious meaning and intent. Nor am I aware that any one has denied that the *object* of the Society has been correctly understood by the Executive of the Society, while there has been much misapprehension as to the meaning of the language in which the Constitution defines and limits the *means* it adopts to promote its main object. Yet the terms which restrict the Society to the use of certain specified means are just as simple and obvious in their meaning, as are those which bind it to the object itself. The object is stated to be "to diffuse a knowledge," etc., and "to promote the interests," etc.

But before attempting to shew the true meaning of the words which state the means, permit me to say a word, 1st, respecting "a knowledge," etc., and 2d, respecting the obligatory nature of the Constitution.

It binds itself to the diffusion of *a* knowledge, etc., and not *the* knowledge—not *all* that is revealed respecting Christ, nor all that which some good men think is revealed as saving knowledge, nor all which they may think will promote vital godliness and sound morality. It is pledged to diffuse a portion only of this knowledge, and that portion only which comes within the range and limits to which it has bound itself to keep in all it issues for this diffusion and promotion. If they meant to include all revealed knowledge of Christ, or all that some good men claim to know of Him, or that is related to piety and morality, why did the framers of the Constitution so carefully use *a* instead of *the*, when the latter would not only have been more natural but necessary.

THE CONSTITUTION IS A REALITY AND IS OBLIGATORY.

Some have said, we care nothing about the Constitution. It may mean this or it may mean that.

Any institution, religious, moral, financial, or manufacturing, existing under a written constitution, to which the State has given corporate powers, is not so trifled with by our judicial tribunals, when they are brought to their bar, for the adjudication of any legal question pertaining to these rights and powers. They treat their constitutions and by-laws, and the administration of these, as serious facts, and claim the right to know what they mean, and what they were intended to secure, and to decide these questions accordingly and definitely.

Should the present controversy carry this Society before such a tribunal, its Constitution will be recognised as a *fact*, and as having a definite meaning, object and obligations.

THE NATIONALITY OF THE SOCIETY CONFIRMED BY ITS FOUNDERS.

Within one month after its organization, June 1825, the Publishing Committee adopted and issued its *first* Tract, No. 1 of its series, now continued to No. 600. The title of this tract is, "THE ADDRESS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY TO THE CHRISTIAN PUBLIC, AT ITS ORGANIZATION IN 1825."

The Address begins with the following paragraph:

"The Executive Committee of the AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY, by this document, beg the privilege of addressing the Christian community upon one of the most interesting subjects which has ever attracted the notice of those whose stations or whose character give them influence over the destiny of their fellow-men."

The Address was written by Rev. Dr. Spring, a member of the first Publishing Committee. It relates the history of the organization, its catholic character and national design—states the fundamental doctrines in which evangelical Christians are agreed—facts and considerations shewing the need of such a Society, and the comprehensiveness of its design, and such considerations as are adapted to secure the confi-

dence, sympathies and coöperation of good men. It is a lucid and able document, and is worthy of the same attention now as it received when first issued. It is dated New York, June 1825, and "signed in behalf of the Executive Committee," James Milnor, Gardiner Spring, John Knox, Justin Edwards, Charles G. Sommers, John Summerfield, who then constituted the Publishing Committee.

At this time Mr. Summerfield was confined to his bed by a sickness which soon proved fatal. This document was there read to him. He gave his most cordial approval, and unable to write, requested that his name might be affixed to it as his dying testimony to its principles and spirit. As from this earliest publicly recorded testimony of the founders I shall have occasion to quote, I have thought it well to give this brief sketch of its history.

The following passages relate to its national design and object:

"Peculiar advantages, it appears to the Committee, will result from the formation of a great Institution whose operations shall extend *over our whole country*, and, as far as practicable, even beyond its limits. The two-fold union of various *local institutions*, and of Christians of different denominations, all applying their powers in a common direction, and uniting the concurrence and feeling of this free and enterprising *nation*, appears to be the only measure which can secure all the energy of operation that is needed. The world at large, the adjacent states of South America, the islands of the West Indies, and *our own United States in particular*, present a vast and inviting field for the exertions of a Society combining the efforts of the *whole Christian community*. *Our own country* contains a population of more than eleven millions, scattered over an extent of more than one million of square miles, every hour becoming a more numerous and more reading population. Should God lift his smile upon the Society, it will speak to the remoter corners of the globe. The purpose of its conductors is, to publish Tracts in various languages, and to be heralds of Divine mercy, not to our own population only, or to the provinces of our Northern and Southern frontier, but to Eastern and Western Asia and the Southern Ocean. But how can this be accomplished without a more generous and undivided impulse? Every new Institution, also, of such character, exerts a happy influence on our *national union*, and is a new accession of the best and strongest affections of the human heart, gathered from the remotest parts of the land, to 'lengthen the cords and strengthen

the stakes' that bind together the body politic; so that, while public opinion maintains its existing ascendancy, every new accession of diffusive benevolence will render it more and more difficult for the spirit of faction or usurpation to sever this *cemented country*. And so long as public opinion maintains its existing supremacy, who does not feel the immense importance of moulding it by a moral and religious influence, and of securing and augmenting our civil and political liberties by the most unconfined diffusion of the lights of science and religion throughout a community whose political existence depends on the intelligence, and, more especially, on the integrity of *the people*? We might add to these considerations that, should approved Tracts be supplied to the *nation* from one general establishment, one set of stereotype plates, and one set of engravings, one Board of Managers and Officers, and one centre of transportation, the economy of such a measure in all the expenditures and labors of the Society must be a powerful argument in favor of the *union*. Tracts are now exceedingly cheap, but the Committee are greatly deceived if the formation of the AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY does not render them cheaper than they now are, and if the parent Depository is not able to supply the country at a lower rate than they can be supplied by the local Societies. And why should the establishment of a general Institution diminish the zeal of the local Societies? Are they not all moving forward from the desire of doing good, and under the paramount impulse to what is best? With the Divine blessing on the AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY, the Committee have little doubt that a course will be pursued which, by augmenting the zeal of the whole, will augment the zeal of the parts; which, while it shall secure the confidence, will concentrate the unabated and increased efforts of the *nation*; and which, while it invigorates the heart, will pour its life-blood, with accelerated force, through *every artery and vein*.

"We live, fellow-citizens, at an eventful period of the world. The purposes of God's mercy appear to be rapidly unfolding, and rapidly and surely advancing towards their final issue. New scenes are already opening upon the world and upon the Church; and the 'enterprise to be achieved is the conversion of the world to its Redeeming God and King.' In this vast and arduous enterprise no portion of mankind are bound to feel a deeper interest than the people of these *United States*. The state of our *country* is one of unparalleled prosperity. At peace among ourselves and with all nations, our population is becoming 'as the sand which is by the sea, in multitude.' Our industry and wealth are giving this favored

people a high elevation in the catalogue of nations. The light of science and the arts is diffusing its influence through every part of our growing republic. Our plans of internal improvement and public utility are raising our dignity and glory in the view of future ages; and our happy religion, born of God, descended from heaven, and dwelling in undisturbed security in this Western World, has already exerted its efficient power in forming here a people for his praise. The Committee indulge the hope that *great multitudes* in this happy portion of the globe will enrol their names among the patrons of this Institution and the benefactors of mankind. They know that the enterprise in which they are engaged is one which cannot prosper, unless the God of all the earth control and prosper it."

This Address abounds in expressions of the largest catholic Christian benevolence and of the broadest national designs, and I must think the passages quoted sufficient to prove two facts. 1st. The founders aimed to establish not a sectional but a *national* Society. 2d. They designed it to supply all kindred local Societies in every State with Tracts which they could circulate. 3d. This earliest cotemporaneous testimony of the men who framed the Constitution, and who took the most efficient part in organizing the Society, and constituted its first Publishing Committee, is conclusive proof of the true interpretation of their own organic law, and which they adopted in their first and successive official acts. One of these gentlemen, the Rev. Dr. Knox, had continued in this Committee each successive year to January of this year, when he suddenly deceased. Every succeeding member of this Committee has adopted and practised their interpretation of the Constitution, for one third of a century.

This conclusion is confirmed by Judicial Rules—6th, 7th, and 8th. Pp. 17, 18.

THE TRUE MEANING OF THE LANGUAGE.

Let me now ask your attention to the important words in the first Article. It states explicitly that, **THE OBJECT SHALL BE TO DIFFUSE** a knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of sinners, and to promote the interests of vital godliness and sound morality. **TO DIFFUSE** this knowledge, etc., is the **EXPRESS AND MAIN THING** for which the Society was formed and which it has **OBLIGATED ITSELF TO DO**.

BY THE CIRCULATION OF RELIGIOUS TRACTS CALCULATED TO receive the approbation of ALL EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS.— In these words the MEANS are stated which it proposes and has OBLIGATED itself to employ in promoting its MAIN AND CHIEF PURPOSE. This is so obviously the *one intent* of its founders and these so obviously the means which they adopted to promote their main object there seems to be no evading this conclusion.

In harmony with this as their main object, and in harmony with these as the means which they adopted, must every subsequent article of the Constitution be interpreted.

These significant words are employed both in the imperative and restrictive, or in the prohibitory and the obligatory sense. The true meaning of these words must be that which is in harmony with the intention and main object of the founders. This meaning we can ascertain by observing the rules which Judicial tribunals have laid down for interpreting the language of all written documents involving questions which they adjudicate.

The principal of these rules applicable to this case are the following :

1st. "The intention of the writers is the first and great rule of interpreting documents."

Blackstone, 2—379 and 381.

2d. "When the intention of the writers is clear the words must be so interpreted if possible."

Chancellor Kent's Com., 4—534.

3d. "If a charter will bear a double construction, and in one sense it can effect its purpose, and in the other not, it will receive the construction which will make it efficacious."

Parsons on Contracts, 2—16.

4th. "Courts seem to agree of late, that the decision must always depend upon the intention of the parties, to be collected in each particular case from the terms of the agreement itself, and from the subject matter to which it relates."

Parsons on Contracts, 2—39.

5th. "The words are to be taken in their natural and obvious sense, and not in sense unreasonably restricted or enlarged."

Judge Curtis, 3—564. U. S. Supreme Court.

6th. "Great weight has always been attached, and rightly, to cotemporary exposition." Judge Curtis, 5—18. U. S. S. C.

Judge Marshall says, in regard to cotemporary exposition :
 "Such as the Federalist upon the Constitution of the United States, which is appealed to by all parties." "The part, too, which its authors performed, in framing the Constitution, put it very much in their power to understand the views with which it was framed."

That the usage of the Executive and Publishing Committee, in interpreting and acting under the Constitution, for thirty-two years, confirms its meaning and is sustained by the authority of the following rules, and settles the question of its construction.

"Practise and acquiescence, under it, (the Constitution of the United States was the question before the Court,) for a period of several years, affords an irresistible answer, and has indeed fixed the construction."

Judge Marshall. Cranch, 1—309.

"If words are doubtful, the constant usage may be resorted to, for the purpose of explanation."

Phillips, 1—450.

"Universal usage is a proper exposition, where the words are doubtful."

Phillips, idem.

"*All Evangelical Christians.*" It is generally admitted that *all* is not here used in the limited and restricted sense, but in the general and popular sense, and I need not dwell on that word. "A knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of sinners." As the main object of diffusing this knowledge is the conversion to him of sinful men, it must mean to secure such a cordial belief in Him, as to produce vital godliness in the heart, and the promotion in the life, and by example and influence, of sound morality. This is a statement of what is cardinal and fundamental in evangelical Christianity, and is, comprehensively, the essence and substance of the Gospel. This is substantially and comprehensively the Constitutional Creed of the Society. Who will deny to him who thus believes this knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ the right to be regarded an evangelical Christian, or count him destitute of vital godliness, or not the promoter of sound morality!

The man, who, although professing this belief, does not in a good degree conform his life to it, has no claim to be so regarded. His faith is a dead faith. This is the simple and beautiful description of what the founders understood to con-

stitute, essentially, an evangelical Christian, and is the constitutional standard for determining who are "evangelical Christians," whose approbation their tracts must be "calculated to receive." This is *the standard* of the Constitution. By this are the Publishing Committee to decide what tracts are calculated to receive the approbation of "all evangelical Christians." Denominations and churches and creeds may erect other standards more positive, dogmatic, and minute in detail, but the Society is bound by none except its own standard.

What the founders understood to be embraced in the comprehensive statement which they made in the Address I have already referred to; they affirm the great doctrines in which they all harmonize to be, "Man's native sinfulness—the purity and obligation of the law of God—the true and proper Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ—the necessity and reality of his atonement and sacrifice—the efficiency of the Holy Spirit in the work of renovation—the free and full offers of the Gospel, and the duty of men to accept it—the necessity of personal holiness—as well as an everlasting state of rewards and punishments beyond the grave—these are doctrines dear to our hearts, and constitute *the basis* of our union."

The different explanations and philosophies of these cardinal truths, in controversy among Christians, they meant to exclude from the issues of the Society.

"*Religious Tracts.*" They are not required, to approve all kinds of *religious* or moral Tracts, merely because they are religious, or because they are so religious, in the evangelical sense, that some good men think they will promote certain good ends. But they must be religious, in the evangelical sense, and also, in thought, style and spirit, and must be such as this Committee judge adapted to promote *the proposed end*, and such also as can be *circulated* in all parts of our country.

"*Calculated.*" When a Tract is offered for publication, who is to determine whether it possesses the requisite character, and is calculated to receive the approbation of all evangelical Christians? They did not leave this to be determined by the members individually, nor by churches, or denominations, or conventions. They made special and definite provision, in the 5th and 6th Article of their Constitution, for this important matter, by creating within and of the Society, a board of intelligent and competent men, who are annually elected a Committee, especially to decide this question.

"ARTICLE V. The Board of Directors shall annually elect, by ballot, a Publishing, a Distributing, and a Finance Committee, each consisting of not less than three, nor more than six members; the members of which three Committees shall constitute an Executive Committee, to conduct the business of the Society, and shall be, ex-officio, members of the Board. The Board shall have power to enact By-Laws, and to appoint Honorary Vice-Presidents, Directors, or members. Twelve members of the Board, present at any meeting regularly convened, shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

ARTICLE VI. To promote in the highest degree the objects of this Society, the Officers and Directors shall be elected from different denominations of Christians; the Publishing Committee shall contain no two members from the same ecclesiastical connection, and no Tract shall be published to which any member of that Committee shall object."

THE PUBLISHING COMMITTEE ARE CONSTITUTED THE SOLE AND FINAL ARBITERS OF THIS QUESTION, AND THEIR DECISION MUST BE UNANIMOUS.

The 6th Article prescribes the qualifications of this Committee and its duties, and delegates to each member the veto power.

Their action and decision is not on *subjects*, but on specific *tracts* proposed for publication. They must decide nationally and not sectionally. This has been their uniform practise. They never decide sectionally, or to publish on any given *subject* proposed to them, but on such *tracts* as are offered to them. Hence, in the Annual Report, 1856, the Publishing Committee explicitly said, that if there were tracts on "duties and evils" connected with the subject of slavery, "*in which evangelical Christians north and south would agree*," they knew no reason why they should not be approved and published. But the demand now made upon them goes farther: it is that they shall issue what one body of evangelical Christians strenuously *demand*, and other bodies of evangelical Christians as strenuously *resist*.

The Constitution itself, as I have shewn, furnishes the standard for deciding who they are to whom any tract is calculated to be acceptable, and whether it will promote the object, and can be circulated.

The only tracts which the Committee are authorised to approve and circulate must be: 1st. Religious or moral tracts.

2d. Such as *can be circulated* in the ordinary way, and in every State of our Union. 3d. Such as are adapted to promote the objects specified in the Constitution; and 4th. Such as THAT COMMITTEE judge are "*calculated*" to receive the approbation of all evangelical Christians.

Each tract must be so conformed to those requisitions as to meet the approval of each one of this Committee. What they cannot agree to publish they must reject; and in their decision the members must acquiesce or break up the Society. The nature of the Society admits of no other alternative.

It is difficult to see how such a Society, with such means to promote its object, could practically exist without such a tribunal as the Publishing Committee. These six intelligent and judicious men are presumed to represent fairly the views, feelings and interests of the different classes of evangelical Christians, and to understand their common faith, and on what points they differ, so as to avoid invasion of, and conflict with, denominational interests, and what will be acceptable and valuable in promoting those interests which each regards as essential, and, also, what can be circulated throughout the common domain.

THEIR DECISION FINAL.

The Publishing Committee are virtually made the Supreme Court of the Society, for determining what it can, and what it cannot, "*circulate*," as well as publish, under the Constitution.

From their decision there is no appeal. The Society itself has no legal, or moral, right to reverse their decision, *till it has first altered its own Constitution*, and this in the way which it prescribes—by a two thirds majority of the members present, at an annual meeting, notice of which alteration must be given a year previous.

When a tract is offered for publication, this Committee are as much obligated to decide, either to accept, or to reject it, as is the Supreme Court of the United States to decide any case lawfully before it.

Neither the individual members of the Society, nor the Society itself, or any convention, or body of Christians, have any more legal, or moral, right to instruct this Committee, what to publish, and what to reject, than they have to instruct that Court how to decide any given case before it. This prerogative the Society has transferred from itself into their hands, to be exercised by them until it takes it back, by altering the Constitution.

NATIONAL HARMONY OF EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS IS A VITAL ELEMENT OF THE UNION, AND ESSENTIAL FOR ITS MAIN OBJECT.

That on the basis of this broad national harmony in their union the founders framed the Constitution on which they expected to maintain the Society, is evident, not only in that document itself, but also in the exposition of the scope and design of the institution by the Publishing Committee at its organization. In this Address they say:

"In all that pertains to the essential principles of Christianity, it cannot be otherwise than that there exists a union of affection and sentiment among all good men, by whatever name they may be called; and we are persuaded this *harmony* exists to a degree beyond the anticipations not only of the more vigilant and cautious, but of the more indulgent and liberal. We do believe that if good men beheld each other's goodness through a near medium, and one less obscured, they would be more under the direction of a reciprocated confidence, and their prejudices and fears would melt away before the benignant influence of holy love. And we do mean to affirm, that were there a more scrupulous regard to the infallible judgment of God, and a less scrupulous regard to the fallible judgment of men; if the rivalry of denomination were merged in the rivalry of benevolent enterprise; if the fear of God and the love of Jesus Christ; if a tender compassion for the salvation of sinners, and a tender affection towards all the friends of the Redeemer, were the paramount principles of action, chilling alienations would pass away, heart-burning suspicions would find no place, mutual criminations would be suppressed, more importance would be attached to the things in which we agree, and less to those in which we differ; there would be more of the soul of union; and while the enemies of our religion would be again constrained to bear the honorable testimony, 'See how these Christians love one another,' we ourselves should sing, 'Behold how good and how pleasant it is for *brethren to dwell together in unity!*'"

"The Committee cannot feel that this is a visionary enterprise. They no longer regard it as a doubtful experiment. On the most matured view of all the difficulties they can anticipate, they are persuaded that it is a practicable and high-born undertaking. The indications of Divine Providence have so manifestly led to it, that though they have all admitted some anxious speculations, they dare not hesitate. It is with deep-felt gratitude delight that they have watched the

superintendence of the Holy Spirit over this novel and hopeful attempt; and already do they indulge the expectation, that, under the same refreshing influence, the riches of the harvest will correspond with the splendor of this early promise. Who can tell but the time is drawing near, when the different sections of the church of God on earth shall be 'perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment;' and that without either embracing or propagating error, or suppressing truth, (and without withholding their censure from all who believe 'another Gospel,') they shall imbibe that amiable and conciliating temper whose attractive influence shall allure them to concentrated efforts in every labor of love? Who can tell but the present is an instance of *harmony* and coöperation which will prepare the way for other and more important instances, when in unity of faith and unity of spirit, no benevolent enterprise shall fail through the *discordancy* of Christians; and when in every cause that demands prompt and extended coöperation, the friends of the Redeemer shall know how to combine their energies against the common foe? Who will not say, 'The Lord hasten it in his time!' 'Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see *eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion.*'"

Could these men have expressed such broad and catholic views of the necessity and value of union and harmony, if they supposed that they had formed a Society for issuing tracts on any subject which would destroy that harmony in any section of the country?

In the recent controversy, it has been attempted to prove that the prohibitions of the Constitution relate only to doctrines and rites, ordinances and ecclesiastical or denominational differences, and not to controverted moral questions. For proof of this opinion this earliest exposition of the first Publishing Committee has been appealed to. But this proof fails and is invalid.

1st. This construction is not warranted nor implied by any language of the Constitution; nor is it asserted or implied, by any fair construction of this cotemporaneous exposition of the Constitution, but on the contrary, much of its language, as well as its whole drift and tone, is opposed to it.

2d. Controversy and discord respecting any doctrine or opinion in morals is as fatal to *union*, and as sure to defeat its special and main object, as would be controversy and discord respecting any of the other topics, excluded because there is not the requisite agreement respecting them. Without

harmony in the union, the *union* itself cannot exist nor its object be prosecuted.

3d. *Continued usage*, for one third of a century, is itself decisive against the validity of this construction of the Constitution.

This conclusion is sustained by the judicial rules above quoted, and particularly in the following :

"Practise and acquiescence under it (U. S. Constitution,) for a period of several years affords an irresistible answer, (to the objection,) and has indeed fixed the construction."

Judge Marshall. Cranch, 1—309.

"Universal usage is a proper exposition, if the words are doubtful."

Phillips, 1—540.

See Rule 3d, page 17.

Hence, whenever the Publishing Committee find that any of the publications they have issued are disapproved by such a number of Christians, in any section, as they judge will impair the harmony and usefulness of the Society, they must drop such from their list, whether they can gain a limited circulation or not. For this reason they have dropped several tracts and three books. Better drop a dozen good books, than by retaining them promote discord.

The union itself can no more exist without a good degree of *harmony* than the human body can without its own healthy blood. Without harmony in the union, it is a house divided against itself. Discord and controversy, continued long, is as certain to destroy the Society, as the floods and tempest will destroy the house founded on sand.

DEPENDS ON A NATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONFIDENCE.

That the founders designed to secure this national Christian confidence is proved by the fact that Northern and Southern Christians were equally received as members, and with equal rights, privileges and responsibilities. It is also proved by the fact that, in the Convention, the southern Tract Societies and southern Christians were represented. In order to secure this national confidence, delegates were invited from the local Societies, both north and south, and their object was especially to form a Society which should furnish those local Societies with such tracts, calculated to receive the approbation of all evangelical Christians, as they could *circulate* in their different localities, and thus supersede the necessity of their publishing.

The Society depends on *Christian confidence* for its life and usefulness. On this nationally wide confidence it has lived and prospered for one generation, and done great good for our common Christianity and country. Who does not know, that the controversies which certain religious journals have excited and sustained among its members and patrons, for three years past, have extensively weakened confidence, diminished its resources, and crippled its operations many thousands of dollars annually. Neither the cause of Christ nor the best interests of our country can afford to let it die in such a strife. Rather than yield its control to those who would pervert it from its original design, in order to make it subserve the interests of some party or section of the country, let its operations be suspended till evangelical Christians are better agreed, by a more intimate union with our blessed Lord and Master.

DIFFUSION MUST BE NATIONAL BY THE CIRCULATION OF RELIGIOUS TRACTS.

The Society has bound itself to "*diffuse*" a knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to do this by the "*circulation*" of approved religious Tracts. These are the *specific means* which it has obligated itself to employ for the definite end for which it was organized. In whatever incidental ways it may promote this end, they must be connected with, or auxiliary to this, as the chief means. The diffusion must be, not by churches and pastors, as *its* means, but by the *circulation* of such tracts. To publish or procure tracts, merely, and not circulate them, or to publish such as *cannot be circulated* by the ordinary channels, and by direct agency, is as surely to fail of the *diffusion* of this knowledge, as it would be to educate a good man for the ministry and ordain him to the work, knowing that he is a dumb man, and never can preach. *Diffusion* and *circulation* are both equally absolute and imperative, and the latter is absolutely indispensable to the former. Nor is this to be evaded by a circulation limited to one or ten States, for this would be to limit the diffusion to these States, and contrary to the main object. Is it credible, by any candid man, that such a limitation in diffusing this knowledge was even thought of, much less deliberately designed, by the founders of the Society?

THE HISTORICAL FACTS REFUTE SUCH AN ASSUMPTION.

The delegates to the Convention were from all parts of the country, and some of them delegates from various local Societies. As means to the end proposed, the Convention expressly designed to form a Society, so comprehensive and catholic in its aim, that it could supply those local societies and good men with tracts which could be circulated in every State, and in all sections of a common country. Can any candid northern man, knowing the facts in the case, now believe that the northern delegates would have consented to form a Society for the purpose they did, and give it the authority they did, to publish certain religious tracts designed to supply northern Christians, and so cheap and so good as to supersede the necessity of publication by the local Societies, and at the same time give the Society a power to publish tracts which they could not, for any reason, circulate in their own localities? Will any candid northern man believe, that the southern delegates then supposed that they were forming a Society, in which Southern Christians were invited to be members with equal rights and privileges, and from which their local Societies and southern Christians and ministers were to obtain tracts, and were giving it authority to publish tracts on any subject which, for any reason, *could not be* circulated in their section? If any man believes that either the southern or northern delegates, supposed that they were forming *such* a Society, with any *such* powers, then he must admit, that neither had sense enough to understand by what means they could accomplish the purpose for which they formed the Society, and through pure imbecility adopted means sure to nullify their own express design.

But is it not a gross assumption, as well as too late, to charge any such deficiency to these men? They did well understand their object and well knew by what means it could be effected. The argument is valid. If the reasons which must have influenced the northern delegates to form a Society, for *such* an object, and for *such* purposes as they so intelligibly and definitely stated in its Constitution and in their cotemporaneous exposition of this, were valid for them, they must be equally valid for the southern delegates. Passion, party feeling, political and sectional prejudices may deny this; but candor, reason and christian charity will not.

The evidence, from the Constitution, from the well known object they meant to secure, from cotemporaneous history, and from the most intelligent and active participators now

living, who participated in the preliminary counsels and action, in framing the Constitution and in the organization of the Society, is conclusive that they intended as expressly to prohibit the Society from being made a sectional and religious-political Society, as they did from its being made a denominational or sectarian one.

That this was so understood at that time, by the delegates, by the local Tract Societies, and by Christians in all the States, is confirmed by the fact, that the local Societies, in both sections, soon merged themselves in the National Society, either as auxiliaries or branches, drew from it their tracts for circulation, ceased publishing themselves, and paid their surplus funds to it as to a common treasury.

The Boston Society, in less than one month, at its annual meeting, harmoniously voted to be a Branch of the new Society; made over to it both series of its Tracts entire, for the basis of those of that Society; sold to it its stereotype plates, cuts, etc., ceased publishing on its own account, and has continued to receive and circulate exclusively its publications, and to coöperate harmoniously with it in all operations, home and foreign,—paying to it the funds it does not expend on its own field,—appropriating these to such specific objects as it chooses, and limits its direct operations to the four northern New England States, leaving the National Society to provide for and direct Tract operations in the other sections of the country.

The Religious Tract Society, of Charleston, became the South Carolina Branch. The Society in Augusta, Georgia; the one in Richmond, Virginia; and the one in Baltimore, Maryland, were united as auxiliaries to the National Institution. The New York Religious Tract Society merged itself in it. The New York State Society, located in Albany, and the Connecticut Society, in Hartford, became Branches; and the two Societies in New Haven became auxiliaries. A Branch Society was soon formed in Philadelphia. The Evangelical Tract Society in Boston, consisting principally of our Baptist brethren, also became its auxiliary. Other existing Societies, in different parts of the country, soon did the same, and new auxiliaries were formed in several of the large towns in the western and southern States.

This national confidence soon expressed itself in liberal contributions. In the second year of the Society's existence, the Baltimore Society sent to its treasury \$250; the Richmond, \$341; the Charleston, \$350; the Augusta, \$831; the Savannah, \$80. So Wheeling, Norfolk, New Orleans, Huntsville, Louisville, Lexington, as well as the northern cities,

sent their funds to the New Society. These sums may seem small. But the whole operation was then small. The whole amount of donations to the Society, the first year, was less than \$7,000. Whether small or large, they show that the interest felt, and the confidence reposed, were not confined to any one section of the country, but were general and national.

This national and cordial coöperation and confidence have continued, and steadily increased, in the north, south and west. As early as 1827, there were fifty-eight auxiliaries in the Southern States. In 1828, there were one hundred and thirty-five. During the same year, thirty-four individuals, in those States, were made Life Directors by the payment of fifty dollars each, and sixty-four Life Members, by payment of twenty dollars each. In 1829, the whole number of auxiliaries and branches, immediately connected with the National Society, was six hundred and thirty, all of which sent donations to the Society that year. These were found in twenty-seven States and Territories. More of these auxiliaries existed in New York, Connecticut, and Virginia, than in any other three States. The north and the west gave with increasing liberality, and contributions from all sections have ever since that time steadily advanced.

The publications of the Society have been welcomed by good men in all sections of the country. Colportage has been prosecuted in all the States, and has been cordially approved, and liberally patronised, by evangelical Christians, in the South as in all sections, from California to Maine, and from Texas to Canada. The experiment of a union of evangelical Christians, for more than thirty years, for the one single object of disseminating, to the widest extent, the great essential truths of our common Christianity, has so far proved to be practicable, and more successful than the good men who founded the Society at that time anticipated.

These facts prove, if *facts* can prove any thing, that good men in both sections, and of all parties and denominations, then understood the scope and design of the Society, as the Convention understood them, and that they, also, then understood the meaning and intent of the Constitution, as its framers understood it, prohibiting the Society from issuing tracts, on any subject, which could not be circulated in any or all the States of our Union.

So those who for thirty-two years have administered the Constitution have understood it. So one entire generation, who have contributed to its funds, welcomed and circulated its tracts, have understood it, till quite recently, when certain

religious journals have extensively inflamed sectional prejudices and party political feeling, and enlisted these passions to force into it publishing, more definitely and offensively, on the subject of slavery. On this subject in its morality, as a *sin in itself*, as well as in regard to the best manner of dealing with it, good men, north and south, were not agreed thirty-two years ago, nor are they now.

This vexed and difficult problem was considered in the meetings of the founders, who framed the Constitution, and also in the Convention which adopted it, and was regarded by them as belonging to that class of moral questions, on which the Society could not publish, any further than it should be found that evangelical Christians were agreed. The discussion on the subject of slavery had not then reached the same intensity as of late, yet the danger of alienation on this subject was clear to every reflecting mind. Then as now the very mention of slavery on a catholic platform would have been regarded as a watchword of division. The delegate from Augusta, Georgia, was placed on the Committee to nominate the Society's officers. At its public organization, as Rev. Mr. Summerfield, then from Baltimore, sat by the side of Rev. Dr. De Witt, and perceived heart meeting heart, he said to him, I hope this Society will be the means of cementing northern and southern Christians; and as, soon after, Rev. Joseph Brown, of kindred spirit, was returning from a residence in Charleston, he called at the Society's house to say that any discussion of slavery must be fatal to Christian union. Nothing is more erroneous than the idea that differences on slavery were unknown or unconsidered in the Society's formation.

This is confirmed by the testimony of five of the founders, all of whom were living at the time, Oct. 1857, when they carefully considered the following historical statement of facts within their personal knowledge, in which they affirm that the Constitution and design of the Society was understood, in its prohibitions and requirements, by its founders as it has unanimously been by the Executive Committee for thirty-two years, and as they have endeavored to administer it.

They say:

"Evidently essential as it was to avoid *denominational* contention, it was and ever has been no less so to avoid *political, sectional, and other* strifes often more violent and absorbing. That it was the intent of the language of the Constitution to guard against collision on *any and every* subject sundering true Christians from each other, is not known to have been

questioned by any one through a period of nearly thirty years. If 'contemporaneous testimony is valid in law,' this would seem to be conclusive.

" *These limitations apply equally to what is published on all subjects*, whether Christian doctrines or morals, church polity or ordinances, intemperance, freemasonry, or slavery; and bind the Committee, in reference to any subject whatever, to select and issue only such tracts as promise usefulness and the harmonious consent of evangelical Christians: their silence as to errors lying beyond these limits in no respect implying approval. In the convention which originally adopted the Constitution, and the formation of the Society, Christians from the north and from the south were cordially united. It was then as distinctly understood that the above limitations applied to tracts referring to *slavery* as to any other topic; and the earlier publications show that the Society was then as much restricted in its issues on that subject, as it has been in any part of its history. On this and all subjects the Committee have freely inculcated the unquestioned teachings of the Bible—all its teachings indeed, in the very words of Inspiration, with plain scriptural comments; and the various allusions to this subject in the great practical treatises of Baxter, Bunyan, Flavel, Doddridge, Edwards, and many others selected for publication, have never, so far as known, been either omitted or objected to by any."

This statement is given over the names of the five surviving founders who are still members of the Committee or Secretaries, viz. Rev. John Knox, D. D., Rev. Charles G. Sommers, Richard T. Haines, Moses Allen, and Rev. Wm. A. Hallock, D. D.

One of these gentlemen wrote the first draft of the Constitution. Their testimony is confirmed by the "Address of the first Publishing Committee at the adoption of the Constitution" and who participated in framing it.

All candid men will see at once that this testimony is valid and conclusive. Its conclusiveness is established by the judicial rules of interpretation already quoted, viz.

"The intention of the writers is the first great rule of interpreting documents." Blackstone, 2—379 and 384.

"When the intention of the writers is clear, the words must be so interpreted if possible." Kent's Com., 4—534.

Judge Marshall, U. S. S. C., gives the following illustration of contemporaneous testimony as to the intention of the

framers of the U. S. Constitution. Such as the Federalist upon the Constitution of the United States, which is appealed to by all parties: "The part, too, which its authors (writers in the Federalist) performed in framing the Constitution, put very much in their power the views with which it was framed."

"Practise and acquiescence under it, (U. S. Constitution,) for a period of several years, affords an irresistible answer (to the objection,) and has indeed fixed the construction."

Judge Marshall—Cranch, 1—309.

"The most important rule and one well established and universally received for the interpretation of written documents, is that they should receive such a construction, if the language used will *permit* it, as will carry into effect the *intention* of the parties or framers." Judge Shepley.

"Great weight has always been attached, and rightly, to cotemporary exposition." Judge Curtis, 5—18. U. S. S. C.

Up to this line of agreement the Society has published respecting slavery from the beginning, as any thing suitable was found. More than a hundred passages, scattered through the various publications, from the early issues, may be found in condemnation of the wrongs and abuses which exist in connection with the system; but they utter their testimony in a kind, candid and Christian spirit. It has issued the entire Bible, with brief notes and comments explanatory of the text, which are admitted by moderate men of all parties to express the true meaning of the Scripture in respect to the system. But unfortunately this candid and christian testimony of the word of God itself, does not meet the demands of the temper of some good men.

Many copies of this Bible, and many thousands of this New Testament, have been purchased by our southern brethren in the last five years, read in their families, and used in their Sunday Schools, in many of which there are no other helps to studying this blessed book. Many tracts, addressed to *all* classes of our population, on oppression, injustice and wrong, the sanctity and rights of marriage and family relations, and of the Sabbath, and the evils of indulging in intoxicating drinks, have been scattered every where over the nation. The Society has, from its origin, fairly placed itself against oppression and wrong, in whatever relation found. But in doing this, it has had the wisdom to follow the leadings of divine Providence, entering every open door, and uttering that part of divine testimony on the sub-

ject of slavery to which it originally designed to limit itself,—to that in which evangelical Christians are agreed. It has labored according to God's great plan, for emancipating a fallen and depraved race, from its bondage to the devil, sin and ignorance, and unholy, self-destroying passions, by offering to all, bond and free, *first, spiritual liberty in Christ*, the *great Deliverer* of our race, which is sure to secure, in due time, deliverance from all the consequences of sin, temporal and eternal;—from all the evils which sinners bring upon themselves or suffer from each other.

For this liberty in Christ, *first and chief*, does infinite wisdom and compassion *now* preserve, uphold and govern the material world, and our depraved race, and puts the race on probation, under a system of redemption, that *the great Deliverer might* come in their nature to redeem it, by dying in its stead—*dying* that he might impart his own free and pure life to satan's bondmen, knowing that the inherent power of this new life would, *in due time*, that is in God's own time, raise to temporal freedom all in bonds to men.

Divine wisdom devised this freedom-giving Gospel, as the means. Divine authority promulgates it. Divine power works by it, to the freedom of body and soul on earth, and by the power of this new life, starts man onward and upward, to the perfect freedom of the celestial body, and of the ransomed and purified soul in heaven. And can the Society be condemned for pursuing this plan? If God be for it, who can or ought to condemn it? The opinions of men respecting this divine plan were once such, as led the great Apostle to pronounce that “the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

If, then, it is the *first paramount* duty of the Society to diffuse the knowledge of the Great Deliverer of both soul and body, would it not be a great sin for it so to labor for the latter *first*, as to defeat the former? If it is my *first and paramount duty* to give the Gospel to both master and slave, is it not a *great sin* for me to do *any thing* which will prevent me from doing it?

But it has been said by a few declaimers, that the Gospel, as made known at the South, both by preaching and in tracts, is maimed, “mutilated,” “eviscerated,” and thus deprived of its power to promote piety and morality and save the souls of men. This must have been said in the indiscriminating heat of passion, or only for rhetorical effect. It is too palpably at war with notorious facts to have been said soberly as literal truth, or with the expectation of gaining the concurrence of well informed minds.

The Gospel has been preached in the five old Atlantic Slave States about as long as it has in New England, and so faithfully, that in the State of Virginia alone there are now about 222,000 of its population, one in seven of the whole, who are members of evangelical churches. One in five and one half of the colored population are members of such churches. Nearly the same ratio exists in the other four of these States. The estimate is, that some ten or twelve millions of the colored race in this country have embraced, and, to a good degree, adorned the gospel, since their first introduction to this country. Suppose we deduct one third, even, from these estimates, and the balance is sufficient to prove that bondage there does not, as a fact, generally exclude the Gospel nor its saving power from the colored man; and also that it is *so* preached, to the bond and the free of both races, that God is pleased to make it his own power to the spiritual liberty of both, and to the temporal freedom of tens of thousands of those once in bonds there,—emancipated freely, by the power of the *gospel* on both master and slave.

It is a gross assumption to maintain, as some do, that the Society was *designed* to diffuse, or *can diffuse*, the various interpretations of the Bible, or all religious and moral truth, or to do all the religious and moral work involved in the conversion of the world. It has pledged itself to do only a *part* of this great work, requiring various societies and agencies—many hands and many hearts. Because it was designed and has undertaken to do only a part, and by those means which good men admit are essential to spiritual freedom in Christ, and because that it might do a portion of this most essential work it was *obliged* to prohibit itself from doing another part, can sensible Christian men condemn it? If they do, for the same reason, these men should condemn the good man who has undertaken, earnestly and faithfully, to do all the good he *can*, for not doing *all* the good that needs to be done in the city of his residence, and which must be done by somebody there, and in every place, before Christianity can triumph over all the earth, and as it triumphs over ignorance and sin, bury every form of wrong and oppression of every sort beyond the possibility of a resurrection.

THE UNIFORM PRICES EVINCE ITS NATIONAL DESIGN.

These are made imperative and obligatory by the 8th Article:

"ARTICLE VIII. That the benefits of the Society may be enjoyed no less in distant places than near the seat of its operations, the prices of its tracts shall be, as far as practicable, the same in all parts of the United States."

Is it credible that the southern, any more than the northern Delegates, assented to this stipulation, if tracts were to be published which either did not want, or could not circulate? What interest could either have in forming a Society, designed to supply them with tracts which they neither wanted nor *could circulate*? It does not meet the case to say neither North or South need order such as they do not want, since from the Catalogue each would select. Neither the Catalogue nor the titles of the tracts so fully indicate the contents as, unread, to give confidence that any given tract will prove acceptable and could be "circulated." Besides, how few at a distance from or near to New York, are so familiar with the tracts, or the Catalogue, or even see one, or can find it at hand. It cannot be expected that every member or other person wanting tracts for reading or circulation, can read the tracts before ordering them sent a thousand miles to reach him. Hence, in order to meet this very want, in every *State* and *Section*, this Society was formed, that *such confidence* might be felt, that its simple IMPRINT should carry with it the assurance that each and every publication which bears it, is "calculated" to receive the approbation stipulated for, and could be circulated "in any and every part of our country."*

THE NAME OF THE SOCIETY IS NATIONAL.

This is distinctive and significant, and it shews that the founders meant that all its issues should be adapted to a national circulation and usefulness, and should be such as could be welcomed, and could be circulated in every State.

When, in 1814, the Boston Society was founded, and when in 1816, it was incorporated, it took the name "New England Religious Tract Society," for it then expected that its circulation and its operations would be limited to this field and its funds drawn chiefly from it. But, in 1822, it found its operations had so extended into every State as to have about seven hundred auxiliary Societies, and 112 local depositories of its publications. Twenty-six of the latter and several of the former were found in the Southern States. It had, in fact, become a National Society, and found its tracts circu-

* See Report of Special Committee, 3d resolution, p. 48.

lating in every State. Hence, in 1823, on application to the Legislature, their corporate name was changed to *American*—that its name might indicate the extent of its object and its circulation and of its patronage.

Why was the name *AMERICAN*, rather than that of New York, given to the new Society, unless the nationality of its name was meant to express the comprehensiveness and nationality of its operations and object? The object of giving a name to an Institution is nothing more nor less than simply to indicate what it is designed to *be* and to *do*.

Each of our Societies for diffusing our common evangelical Christianity over this nation and in foreign lands bear our broadest national name, to indicate that their design and operations are to be co-extensive with the name, and that these are such as Christians, in every State, could welcome and use. If this was not understood to be so, would the State have endowed its name and its Constitution with corporate powers? Why do our kindred Societies, established and patronized by one denomination, assume the *name* of that body, unless it be to indicate to the public that their object is especially denominational, and not *broadly national* and catholic, and that they depend especially on their respective denominations for patronage and funds?

This view of the significance and intent of the name is confirmed by Chief Justice Williams, in his letter of 1856, to the Committee who requested his opinion of the legal rights and obligations of the Society, acting under its Constitution, in which he says :

“The Society was to be denominated ‘*American*.’ It was intended to know no North, no South; it was intended to embrace all denominations designated evangelical, nay, more, all Christians who could be considered as evangelical.

“Now that there are churches of every denomination called evangelical, scattered over all our southern States, as well as individual Christians, who would not approve of publications of the character proposed, is well known. Some may oppose them for one reason and some for another; but whatever the motive, the great mass of individual Christians, and of Christian churches, we have reason to believe, would say that such tracts did not receive the approbation of all evangelical Christians among them. What then should the American Tract Society, with their Constitution for their guide, do?

“Shall they, without other evidence, denounce all these churches, and all these individuals, as not evangelical? What authority have they for this; and how would such a sentence be regarded in courts of justice?

"When this Society was incorporated by the name of the American Tract Society, I will venture to say, that no one who voted to give it corporate powers supposed that there were no evangelical churches of any denomination south of the Potomac, or that the effect would be to confine its operation to the free States. It was a well-known fact, that the Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Congregationalists, Methodists, Baptists, and Dutch Reformed, as a body, were known as evangelical. The Constitution, therefore, which speaks of evangelical Christians, refers to these denominations, not intending, however, to exclude other evangelical Christians.

"Now, unless these southern churches of these various denominations have renounced their creed, or been denounced by the ecclesiastical tribunals to which they belong, it seems to me that they must be treated as of the same faith; and that the officers of the Tract Society have no right to say they are not evangelical Christians; and if so, the Tract Society would be bound to issue no tracts which would not be calculated to secure their approbation.

"The sentence of excommunication which some, in their hear, have pronounced against southern ministers and southern churches, is ex-cathedra; and officers acting under your charter would not, in my opinion, be justified in law or conscience, in adopting it. If these southern churches remain evangelical churches, and southern Christians are still evangelical Christians, it is their right, and your duty, to abstain from publishing even truths, the publication of which they would not approve; and I much misunderstand the instrument under which you act, if those who are dissatisfied, however they may complain of the Constitution, have any reason to complain of the course pursued by those whose actions must be regulated by it.

Very sincerely and respectfully yours,

THOS. S. WILLIAMS.

Hartford, March 1856."

The Society has done, as far as it has means and has been practicable, all the good for which it was formed, or has obligated itself to do—leaving other agencies to supply its lack of service in the great work of human redemption, and yet within its own sphere aiding them all. Its sins are those of omission. Is it wise or Christian to condemn and abandon it for its sins of omission—or by continued controversy and discord cripple its resources, weaken its influence, and expel its operations from ten millions of our countrymen?

What good man or good institutions are guiltless of sins of omission? If for such sins this Society is condemned and paralyzed, then must not only many other good institutions, but ministers of the Gospel and the whole Church of Jesus Christ on earth, be condemned. What would Christianity, morality, civilization, education, the freedom of three millions of bondmen here, or the forty millions of their bond brethren in Africa, or the hundred millions of the white population of our own country, on whom the first sun of the next century will dawn, gain by compelling this Society so to publish on *one* topic as to exclude its operations from one third of the territory and population of our country; or by so persisting in this fratricidal strife as to extinguish the cheering light it is now shedding on thirty millions of our countrymen?

Suppose the same demand now made on this Society to publish on slavery should be made, as it might be with as good reasons, upon our other great national catholic institutions, would the results be less fatal? Could not an ingenious writer construct an argument, that slavery is the sin of sins, that passages of the Bible are daily perverted for its support, that the American Bible Society is solely a union of *denominations*, and as the phrase "all evangelical Christians" in the constitution of one Society, so the phrase "without note or comment" in that of another, must bend to the absorbing demand, and even that Society *must* issue comments on slavery.

There is but one question. That question is, Shall all our national or other catholic unions be sundered, their constitutions violated, their funds perverted, their solemn covenants with God and men broken, by the one great divisive and now political wedge of slavery?

Respectfully yours,

SETH BLISS.

Boston, Feb. 6, 1858.

LETTER II.

REPORT OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE.

INSTRUCTIONS.

CHRISTIAN FRIENDS,—In calling your attention to this Report, I propose to answer the question, Did the Special Committee give any instructions to the Publishing Committee as to what must be published on the subject of slavery? That Committee had already gone as far on this topic as they judged evangelical Christians were agreed, and beyond this line they conscientiously believe the Constitution prohibits them. The question is not, what some members of the Special Committee or members of the Society desired and expected to have done, but what did that Committee actually do?

I maintain, that they gave no instructions on this subject, but only advice, leaving this question as they found it, and where the Constitution has placed it.

I maintain this, because no authority was delegated to that Committee to report specific instructions on this subject;—

Because their report contains no such instructions;—

And because, while the Constitution remains as it is, the Society has no legal or moral right to give any specific instructions to the Publishing Committee, as to what they must or must not publish on any subject.

I shall endeavor to prove, first, That the resolution of the Society, under which the Special Committee were authorized to act, contains no instructions, nor delegates to them any authority to instruct the Publishing Committee, or to lay down any new line of policy or change, or to make any new

interpretation of the Constitution. Previous to the annual meeting in 1856, the Executive Committee had been much censured, by three or four religious Journals, for not themselves inviting, and at once, a Committee of investigation. The Committee, conscious that they had faithfully administered the affairs of the Society in accordance with the plain provisions of the Constitution, and *knowing* that its business and financial concerns had been conducted with economy and fidelity, knew of no occasion for such an investigation; and aware that the demand for this sprang from a desire to press the Society to publishing on slavery further than the Constitution permits, they could see no good to result from it. They might well suppose that the Committee must represent two parties, and hence be divided on a radical question, and that the result must be a majority and minority report, and that the latter would only intensify the strife; or if a unanimous report, it must be a *compromise* one, leaving the matter substantially as they found it, and satisfying neither party. This would only prolong the controversy and complicate the difficulties. But waving these considerations, they adopted the following resolution:

“*Resolved*, That, should it be the pleasure of the Society to appoint a Special Committee to review the proceedings of their Executive Committee, this Committee will welcome and facilitate all inquiries of such a Special Committee, to any extent that shall be desired.”

At the business meeting of the Society, the excitement was such as to fill the church to its utmost. A proposal for the appointment of this Committee was early introduced, accompanied by the declaration that no revolution of the Society was desired, that what the Publishing Committee had reported as to the subject of slavery was substantially *satisfactory*. But notwithstanding this, certain Journals had strongly intimated, if not directly alledged, that there had been a failure of integrity and economy in the management of the financial and business affairs of the Society. This had prejudiced and excited many, and furnished the occasion for the party, which had urged the question of slavery upon the Committee, for persisting in their demand for a Committee of investigation, intending that, somehow, they should act upon this question, whatever occasion there might be or might not be for the other question. The motion for such a Committee was strenuously opposed on the ground that there was no occasion for it; and after long dis-

cussion the whole subject was laid on the table by a vote declared by the President. That vote, however, was disputed: a call was made for the yeas and nays; and in the impracticability of ascertaining, at so late an hour, who were entitled to vote, another audience being then in waiting at the Broadway Tabernacle to attend the religious exercises of the anniversary, and some members of the Executive Committee being ready to challenge investigation into its business transactions; and that Committee having voted on the previous day that "should it be the pleasure of the Society" to appoint such a Special Committee, they would "welcome and facilitate all their inquiries," the Rev. Dr. William Adams of New York, a member of the Executive Committee, proposed the resolution in an amended form, which was supported by Mr. O. E. Wood, also a member of that Committee.

The point was reluctantly yielded, and the resolution was adopted, viz.

"Resolved, That at the suggestion of the Executive Committee themselves, a Special Committee of fifteen be appointed to inquire into and review the proceedings of the Executive Committee, and report to the next annual meeting, or to a duly convened special meeting to be called by said Committee at their discretion."

This will stand on record, a sufficient refutation of the unchristian and slanderous imputations charged upon those christian men and faithful servants of the Society.

The following gentlemen were appointed by the President to constitute the Committee, and announced by him at the ensuing public meeting in the Tabernacle: namely, Hon. Theodore Frelinghuysen, of New Brunswick, N. J.; Rev. Thomas De Witt, D. D., New York; Hon. William Jessup, Montrose, Pa.; Rev. Albert Barnes, Philadelphia; Rev. Francis Wayland, D. D., Providence, R. I.; Rev. M. B. Anderson, LL. D., President of the University, Rochester, N. Y.; Rev. Gregory T. Bedell, D. D., New York; Rev. John S. Stone, D. D., Brookline, Mass.; Rev. John N. McLeod, D. D., and James Donaldson, Esq., of New York; George H. Stuart, Esq., of Philadelphia; Rev. Joel Hawes, D. D., Hartford, Conn.; Rev. Mark Hopkins, D. D., Williamstown, Mass.; Rev. Ray Palmer, D. D., Albany; and Rev. S. S. Schmucker, D. D., Gettysburg, Pa.; comprising members from eight ecclesiastical connections.

"Appointed to inquire into and review the proceedings of the Executive Committee, and report at the next annual

meeting, or to a duly convened special meeting to be called by said Committee at their discretion."

The Executive Committee recommended the following change in the eleventh Article of the Constitution; but owing to the lateness of the hour no action was taken except to refer it to the consideration of the Special Committee :

"*Resolved*, That it be recommended to the Society to amend the last Article of the Constitution, by adding the words, 'On a recommendation of the Board of Directors, which shall have been publicly announced for at least ten days.'"

"To review and inquire into the proceedings of the Executive Committee," and to consider this proposed change in the Constitution, describes all the authority which was delegated to the Special Committee, and also the definite object and end proposed by their appointment. Nothing is here said about what had been published on slavery or must be published, or about any instructions on this subject, or any "new line of policy," or any new interpretation of the Constitution. This subject is not stated or specified in this resolution as one committed to their consideration, nor are any directions given "to inquire into and review their proceedings" on this, any more than to "inquire and review" what has been or should be published on temperance, or profanity, or baptism.

The Society itself is not competent to instruct the Publishing Committee, until it has first altered its Constitution, and this in conformity with its prescribed method.

If the Special Committee had given the Publishing Committee instructions as to publishing on slavery, and if the Society had sanctioned such instructions, and compliance would, in the judgment of the Publishing Committee, be a violation of the Constitution, they would be bound to disregard them; because the Constitution is and must be a higher law to them, in their official duties and responsibilities, than any instructions of the Society can be on that subject, or any other. The prerogative of deciding what may and may not be published on any subject, is a power which the Society has transferred from its own hand to this Committee, which is its Supreme Court, expressly for this purpose. This prerogative the Society cannot annul while they are in office, nor if it should put other men in their places, unless it first so alters its own organic law as to hold it in its own hands in common, or transfer it to some other body.

The report itself contains no instructions to the Publishing Committee as to what they *must* publish on the subject of slavery. Some members of the Special Committee, as well as others, may think it does; but their individual thought or wishes are not the arbiter of this question. Their report has now passed from their hands. It must be interpreted in its parts, and the parts in harmony with the whole and with the authority delegated to them. It must be subjected for its meaning to the established laws for interpreting all public or legal documents.

On the first page of their report they say: "It is to be *remembered* that the Tract Society was founded, not to discuss DISPUTED questions in theology or MORALS, or POLITICS, but to spread the truth in its simplicity and purity, as held and loved by *all* evangelical Christians." "It is due to this interesting occasion, to record with devout thanksgiving to God, the harmony and christian confidence that prevailed in the discussion and adoption of the resolutions on the subject of slavery, forming a part of the report." "And the Committee cherish the hope, that by the divine blessing, their views on the subject will meet the approbation of their friends *in all parts of our country.*"

If they designed to lay down any new line of policy, or any change as to publishing on slavery, or adopt any new interpretation of the Constitution, how could they cherish any hope of such a wide approbation, for its friends are "*all evangelical Christians*" "*throughout our whole country.*"

This view is further confirmed, by the statement of the chairman, in his happy but brief address, in introducing the report, at the opening of the meeting of the Society which adopted it. Speaking in behalf of the Committee he said, "Each one spoke out freely and fully his own views. We were where we had a right to speak freely, and by the blessing of God each one ascertained for himself that that line upon which the Society had been operating for more than thirty years was one upon which the Committee, with all their diversity of opinion, could concur." This statement was published in the New York Independent, in its report of this speech, and of the proceedings of that meeting. It is also found in the report of the speech and of the meeting given in the Annual Report of the Society for 1857. But that line of policy which the Society had pursued in respect to publishing on slavery from its origin, as on all other subjects, had been to publish tracts up to that line in which all evangelical Christians, north and south, were agreed, and which could be *circulated*, and "*would tend to promote the WIDEST*

and *BEST usefulness of this Society throughout our whole country?*" as they advise the Committee *to do*, in their ninth resolution. Whatever meaning some may claim for this language, can it, by any reasonable interpretation, mean that that Committee intended to give, or did give, any *instructions*, or recommend, even, any *new line of policy*, on this vexed and controverted subject? Instead of this, the Special Committee incorporated in their report nine resolutions, in which they expressed their *opinions* as to what could and could not be published, according to the Constitution, and without any change in the line of policy. But before copying them, let me say that the first five were agreed to at their first session, but subject to final action at a future meeting, at which absent members were expected to be present. In the interim, a Sub-committee was to prepare a report on the financial and business affairs of the Society.

That report was prepared and adopted, and will stand on record, a sufficient vindication of the integrity, capacity, and fidelity of the men who, for thirty-two years, had managed the business and finances of the Society, and of its past usefulness to all the great interests of our country. It is interposed between the seventh and ninth resolutions.

The sixth resolution relates to an amendment of the 11th Article of the Constitution. It is not necessary to my purpose to copy this.

I quote their nine resolutions, not in the order in which they are placed in their report, but in such order that they may be seen as one whole, omitting the sixth, which relates to another topic.

They introduce these resolutions by the following prefatory statement, viz.

"In relation to publishing upon the subject of slavery, the Committee recommend the adoption of the following resolutions, as marking out the line of discrimination between what the American Tract Society, *according to its Constitution*, may and may not publish."

"*Resolved*, 1. That the American Tract Society was established for a definite purpose, namely, 'to diffuse a knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of sinners, and to promote the interests of vital godliness and sound morality, by the circulation of religious tracts calculated to receive the approbation of all evangelical Christians.'

2. That this Society cannot therefore with propriety allow itself to be made a special organ of any one system of religious or moral reform, such as temperance, peace, anti-popery,

anti-slavery, etc.; while, within its proper sphere, its influence should sustain the cause of truth and righteousness in all their departments.

"3. That in endeavoring to accomplish its high and holy mission, the Society should deal even-handedly, and bear impartial testimony against all forms of fundamental doctrinal error and practical immorality, prevailing in any and every part of our country.

"4. That in the judgment of your Committee, the political aspects of slavery lie entirely without the proper sphere of this Society, and cannot be discussed in its publications; but that those moral duties which grow out of the existence of slavery, as well as those moral evils and vices which it is known to promote, and which are condemned in Scripture and so much deplored by evangelical Christians, undoubtedly do fall within the province of this Society, and can and ought to be discussed in a fraternal and Christian spirit.

"5. That, whatever considerations in the past may have seemed to recommend to the Publishing Committee the course pursued in its revision of certain works, yet, in the future publication of books and tracts, no alteration or omission of the sentiments of any author should be made; but works not adapted to the design of the Society in their original form, or by a regular impartial abridgment, should be wholly omitted.

"7. That we gratefully acknowledge the favor of divine Providence in the blessing which has rested upon the American Tract Society, in its onward progress of success and prosperity, and the beneficent influence it has exerted upon our country and the world.

"8. That we cordially recognize the fidelity and devotedness with which the interests of the Society have been superintended and conducted by the officers and Executive Committee, five of the present members having been among its original founders.

"9. That with great confidence in the wisdom of the Executive Committee, we anticipate that their action, in carrying out the principles contained in the previous resolutions, will be such as will tend to promote the widest and best usefulness of this Society throughout our whole country."

Signed by THEODORE FRELINGHUYSEN, THOMAS DE WITT, WILLIAM JESSUP, ALBERT BARNES, G. T. BEDELL, JOHN N. MCLEOD, JOEL HAWES, RAY PALMER, S. S. SCHMUCKER, JAMES DONALDSON, FRANCIS WAYLAND, MARK HOPKINS, JOHN S. STONE, GEORGE H. STUART. New York, May 12, 1857.

These resolutions are attested by each of the Committee, except Rev. Dr. Anderson, President of the University at Rochester, who ultimately declined giving his name to their report, chiefly on the ground "that it seemed to him ambiguous, and likely to fail of adjusting the great question at issue."

It should be borne in mind, that up to this time, thirty years from the organization of the Society, no tract specifically on slavery had been offered to the Committee, and no complaint made that it had not published on this subject. No ecclesiastical body, convention or association of evangelical Christians, or individuals, so far as I have ever heard, proposed any such tract, or complained because it had not published one. "All evangelical Christians" had understood, and consented to the fact, that tracts on that subject would not be "calculated to receive their approbation." This usage of the *Society* and of evangelical Christians generally, has, according to the judicial rules already cited, settled the construction of the Constitution, and confirms the construction of the Publishing Committee. This construction is also confirmed by the Special Committee in the affirmation of their chairman, "that that was *the line* upon which they could concur."

This, I maintain, is a demonstration, that the Publishing Committee have correctly interpreted the Constitution. As the Special Committee in their preface to their resolutions state, that the line of discrimination on this subject is "*according to the Constitution,*" their resolutions, whatever the language they employ, must be interpreted in harmony with this construction of the Constitution, as decided to be conclusive by judicial rules.

I now ask your attention to the meaning of the 2d, 3d, 4th, and 9th resolutions especially, because they are all which relate, directly, to the subject in hand. Do they, in fact, contain any instructions requiring the Publishing Committee to publish tracts on slavery?

As the first resolution is the fundamental principle of the Constitution, which was treated of in the previous letter, it is not necessary to consider its import further. Let us begin with the second resolution, viz.

"2. That this Society cannot, therefore; with propriety allow itself to be made a special organ of any one system of religious or moral reform, such as temperance, peace, anti-popery, anti-slavery, etc.; while within its proper sphere, its influence should sustain the cause of truth and righteousness in all their departments."

They begin by affirming, "this Society cannot *therefore*, with propriety, be made a special organ of any one system of religious or moral reform." What can be the meaning of *therefore*, in this direct connection with their first resolution, if the second is not a logical and significant inference from their first? That is, that first and fundamental Article of the Constitution is such, in its obvious principles and language, that "the Society cannot allow itself to be made a special organ" of certain reforms. What can be the relevance or propriety of "*therefore*," if it be not this?

Here an important question is, what is "*its proper sphere*," and what is "*within its proper sphere*?" "*Its proper sphere*" is described and limited by its Constitution. This was the first necessity in forming such a Society—the first and the essential point to secure before the second step could be taken—a constitution adopted, or the Society organized. Hence the founders laid the corner stone of their superstructure on the principle that "*its proper sphere*" is a diffusion of a knowledge of the essential truths of their common Christianity, by all such evangelical Christians as chose to unite in the Society for this purpose. But as this union, in a stipulated *agreement* for this purpose, could not secure their main object, without *harmony* in prosecuting their work, *harmony* is the first necessity of their union. This is so essential and vital to the union and its object, that *whatever* is published which produces strife and discord, throws it *out* of "*its proper sphere*," and must as inevitably result in its dissolution, as the throwing a man out of his proper sphere of existence into the middle of the Atlantic, result in the dissolution of his life. Here are no instructions to publish on slavery.

Let us look into their third resolution :

"3. That in endeavoring to accomplish its high and holy mission, the Society should deal even-handedly, and bear impartial testimony against all forms of fundamental doctrinal error and practical immorality, prevailing in any and every part of our country."

This last clause is decisive that the Committee believed that the Constitution required, that, whatever may be the tracts published, they must be such as *can be circulated* at the south, as well as at the north. They must deal even-handedly and impartially with all the members, north and south, and on all such subjects as come "*within its proper sphere*." The word "*even-handedly*" requires, that they publish as freely on the one hand as on the other. This, of course, advises that if they publish on one side of the

slavery controversy they must on all sides. Each party appeals to the Bible to support his opinions. If the Publishing Committee attempt to decide this question for one party, and ignore the other, they at once plunge the Society into this heated controversy, and promote discord and not "vital godliness," and thus defeat the main object. But this is so flagrantly wrong and such a palpable violation of the Constitution, and so evidently without "its proper sphere," I see not how any man can justify it; for it is undeniable that, on this subject, all evangelical Christians "in any and every part of our country," are not agreed.

The Southern brethren appeal just as confidently to the Bible to support their opinions as do some northern Christians for theirs. Can the Society be the arbiter of this question? If they publish on one side, must they not publish on the other also? Would this be "within its proper sphere"?

Does any body, north or south—knowing what some northern Christians think—believe that tracts on the duties of southern slaves to their masters, approved by all northern Christians, can be circulated *now* in the South?

The southern members claim that they have equal rights and privileges in the Society with the northern members, and, as evangelical Christians, they claim that their views and feelings are entitled to equal consideration as those of their northern brethren. They say that this claim cannot be denied them honorably and impartially. If northern men, say they, insist on its circulating tracts teaching their views of slavery, with what justice or impartiality can it refuse to circulate tracts teaching ours? If, for refusing to do the former, it is charged with bowing down to the South, so for refusing to do the latter, southern Christians say it can, with as good reason, be charged with bowing down to the North. All we ask, they say, is, that it bow down to nothing, except its own Constitution, and to our common Master in heaven.

This resolution contains no instructions to publish on slavery.

THEIR FOURTH RESOLUTION.

"4. That, in the judgment of your Committee, the political aspects of slavery lie entirely without the proper sphere of this Society, and cannot be discussed in its publications; but that those moral duties which grow out of the existence of slavery, as well as those moral evils and vices which it is known to promote, and which are condemned in Scripture

and so much deplored by evangelical Christians, undoubtedly do fall within the province of this Society, and can and ought to be discussed in a fraternal and Christian spirit."

Here, if any where, the instructions are found. Are they here? Let us see.

"That in *their judgment*," etc. This is not the language of men feeling that they had any authority to instruct or dictate, or lay down a new line, or make any new interpretation of the Constitution. But is it not the natural language of men who feel that their authority is limited to *opinions* and *advice*?

"The political aspects of slavery—moral duties and evils, etc., of slavery." Whether any tract on the duties of masters, or on the duties of slaves, (for the relation is reciprocal, and responsibilities must inherently attach to both, if to one party,) will have any of the "political aspects" of slavery, will depend not only on what is within the tract, but also on what is without, in the sectional and political temper of the day, and in the spirit, aim and aspects of sectional and ever-shifting political parties. Does any sensible man believe that any tract "discussing" even "in a fraternal and christian spirit," the "moral duties and the moral evils and vices growing out of slavery," can *now* be issued by this Society, which will not be used by one or the other of the present political parties? Will not each party, in its heat, use a religious or moral tract on slavery, or on any of its duties or evils, according as each may judge of its capability, in existing circumstances, of being so used as to promote the objects of the party? And as "even-handed" successive issues appear, will not both parties thus use the Society for party ends; and this because of "the political aspects of slavery," to which each party finds it practicable to apply these tracts? Will not each party desire to increase its strength among religious men, by showing, from these tracts, that even so great and good and impartial an institution as the Tract Society is on its side? The Society which expects to stand between these stones thrown from opposite sides, must be ground to powder.

Since the report of the Committee was presented, it has become much more apparent that to find a proposed line of discrimination between a discussion of the "*political aspects*" of slavery, and of "*moral duties*" or "*moral evils and vices*" connected with it, is, in the present excited and prejudiced state of our country, a point of immense difficulty, if not practically beyond the reach of the most acute mind and the

most benevolent heart; especially as partisans, both north and south, see, in the first tract that might appear on the subject, a train of anti-slavery issues.

Then it should be remembered, that one party does not believe that slavery, in itself, *necessarily* promotes *moral* evils and vices. But a tract, to please many at the north, must teach that it does; and if it does assume and discuss this doctrine, must not the Society promote the "moral evils and vices" of sectional and ecclesiastical discord and strife, and also extinguish its power to promote "a knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of sinners," instead of *diffusing* this by the circulation of religious tracts?

In this fourth resolution the Committee quietly ignore the "sin per se" doctrine of slavery, and yet they speak of its promoting "*moral* evils and vices," and that "*moral* duties grow out of it." To make these opposite statements consistent, they speak as they might of any other relations between superiors and inferiors, in which power *necessarily* inheres in the superior, and out of which "*moral* duties grow," and in which the power is often so abused as to promote moral evils and vices. This is the view entertained by southern Christians.

The "CAN" and "OUGHT" in this resolution are much insisted on by some, as decisive on the question of instructions. But abstract right, physical power, or a coercive moral power, are excluded from any relevancy to the meaning of these words, as related to any such power which this Society can use. Any such meaning is precluded by its nature, means and object. These words must be understood in conformity with these, and with legal and moral right. The Society can have no right to expend its funds in materials for, or in printing or in *publishing*, tracts to be stored, or merely to keep on sale at its depository. It has obligated itself to *CIRCULATE* them, because it cannot "*DIFFUSE* a knowledge," etc., which it was formed to diffuse, without their circulation. To publish also what cannot be circulated equally fails of *diffusing* this knowledge, and defeats its main object. To circulate "*vi et armis*," is not "within its proper sphere," and is also forbidden by the "fraternal and christian spirit" recommended.

But the Committee say that these duties and evils "can" and "ought" to be discussed in this spirit. This may be true in the abstract, and would be in the concrete, if this discussion could be between "just men made perfect" in holy love. But the Society is only partially sanctified, and its members, friends and "all evangelical Christians" are imperfectly evangelical

Christians. Discussions simply, however good in spirit, merely printed, without circulation, cannot teach duties to those who are thought by some especially to need such teaching, or reprove those whose morals may need reproof. Discussion means, according to Webster, "debating," "agitating," "arguing." This makes two parties, and parties make controversy and discord. The parties are not agreed; do not both approve of the same views; and one party cannot *circulate* the printed discussions which the opposite party thinks ought to be circulated.

Should the Society undertake this discussion for either party, it must disappoint one or the other, and defeat its own object.

But some northern Christians think, that their southern brethren ought to approve, read and circulate, such lessons on their duties and on evils and vices around them as *they* think the Society ought to publish—for, say they, '*our consciences* approve what we expect these tracts to teach, and constrain us to require that the Society teach them to you.' But the southern Christian asks, 'Who made my northern brother the arbiter of my conscience?'

The time has been, say they, when it was believed 'that freedom of *opinion* and freedom of *conscience* was the achievement and glory of Protestant Christianity; and some have maintained that "all evangelical Christians" had something to do in the long struggle for this, and that the triumph cost much of their blood.'

This arrogantly deciding what another's conscience ought to do, when the conscience of the assumed offender says he neither "*can* or *ought*" to do it, and has no power or right to do it, is not very near to "discussing" the matter in dispute in "a fraternal and christian spirit," or very likely to lead the offender to repentance.

But the Committee have themselves decided the sense in which they understood the "*can*" and "*ought*," in their ninth resolution, viz.

"9 That, with great confidence in the wisdom of the Executive Committee, we anticipate that their action, in carrying out the principles contained in the previous resolutions, will be such as will tend to promote the widest and best usefulness of this Society throughout our whole country."

I have already stated that some ignore this resolution, as meaning nothing, or contend that if it does mean any thing, and was put there for any reason, it was designed simply to express their intention to have their previous resolutions executed, or, as they unnaturally phrase it, carried out, etc.

But are such honorable and intelligent men, *the men* to mean nothing by a formal and grave resolution, so carefully drawn and prayerfully considered, and endorsed with their responsible signatures? If *all* they mean is simply their intention to have their resolutions carried out, why did they not express that idea in more natural, simple and direct terms?

Why should they say, "with *great confidence* in the wisdom of the Executive Committee we anticipate," etc. In their eighth, they had just said "that we *cordially* recognise the fidelity," etc., of this Committee. (See p. 44, 8th resolution.) Their Sub-committee had reported, "We believe that the whole financial business of the Society at the Tract House is managed and conducted with an economy and fidelity worthy of all praise." Did that Committee need *another endorsement* directly upon this, requiring them to add, "with great confidence in *their wisdom*," etc.?

Were the Special Committee the men to employ so much cautious language to *mean nothing*? No, they did mean much. An exigency was upon them, as I will soon show, and they must mean enough to meet it. But if they meant by it only, that tracts on slavery must be published, whether they could be circulated in the slave States or not, as some maintain, why did they not stop at the words "the widest and best usefulness of the Society," and why directly add the four significant words "THROUGHOUT OUR WHOLE COUNTRY." When an eminent and respected pastor, a member of that Committee, asked me, four months after their report was made, "why the Publishing Committee did not put forth a tract on slavery?" I asked, how can they, in present circumstances, consistently with your ninth resolution; and why is that a part of your report? His reply was, "It is there to quiet the South." No doubt, this expressed *one* purpose of that resolution. And it was put there to quiet the North too; for a great many at the north would have been deeply disquieted, had it not been in their report. But was it put there a promise to the ear to be broken to the hope? That Committee are not the men to propose that the American Tract Society **VOTE TO DO THIS.**

Hence, it was important that, in the language of these resolutions in relation to slavery, they should re-affirm their entire confidence in the Committee, as men whose *action* in carrying out the principles of the previous resolutions will "tend to promote the widest and best usefulness of this Society *throughout our whole country*,"—that is, as men who would not limit the Society's usefulness to one part of our

country, by *any* "action" which would render its tracts exceptionable and useless in another part.

Its chief and special means for promoting its national wide usefulness, is by the *circulation* of certain approved tracts. It neither "*can*," nor "*ought*," to attempt to carry out the principles contained in their resolutions by any other means than the *circulation* of these tracts. To do so would at once throw the Society out of "its proper sphere." It is plain, then, that it cannot accomplish "its high holy mission," or "promote its widest and best usefulness *throughout our whole country*," by publishing tracts, on any subject, which cannot be "*circulated*;" and it is also as plain that it ought not to *publish* such tracts as cannot be thus widely circulated.

The "*can*" and the "*ought*," then, must mean what is practicable and useful "*according to the Constitution*," as they admit they must be in their second resolution.

But why did a Committee of so honorable and intelligent men agree in a report capable of being understood so differently? The reason of this was not so much in them, as it was in some of the members of the Society, and in the community, and in the course pursued by some religious journals. I have great respect for those gentlemen, and count myself honored by a personal acquaintance with most of them. They doubtless did the best that they could do in the circumstances. As in their own body, so among the members of the Society and its friends, there were two parties respecting the subject of slavery. One party was satisfied with what had been published on this subject, up to the requisite line of agreement and harmony. The other was vehement for going further, and in a more positive tone. The feelings and prejudices of both parties had, of course, their influence in the Committee.

A minority report was eminently undesirable, and it is to be presumed that they would avoid this if possible; for if fifteen so good men could not agree on the question as to what such a Society could lawfully and wisely do in prosecuting so simple a work as it had undertaken, how could its ten or twelve thousand members agree in this?

One party would be content with the first four resolutions, and especially with the "*can*" and "*ought*" in the fourth, interpreted, as it would be, to suit themselves; and had the report closed with the fifth resolution, they would have been satisfied, as time has since proved. There were those in that Committee who well knew, that one party outside, would interpret their fourth resolution as committing the Society to publishing on slavery, as they had demanded. This would

be claimed as a concession to that party, and would be regarded by southern Christians as having been yielded to the dictation of what they regard as anti-slavery journals. Hence some of that Committee were unwilling that their report should go forth in such a position on this subject, as it was at the close of their sixth resolution. They knew it would alarm the southern members, and offend many of the northern. As in all such cases, their only relief was by a compromise, in order to a united report.

These statements are not mere theory. They are no suppositions of the writer, but are matters of known fact, and can be proved in detail by unquestionable testimony. But such testimony is unnecessary. Their report itself affords sufficient evidence of the exigency. They made their compromise by their ninth resolution. This is placed as the last of the series, and is immediately preceded by the seventh and the eighth.

The sixth resolution, relating to a proposed amendment of the Constitution, and the report of the sub-committee "on the financial and business affairs of the Society," are interposed between the first five and the last three resolutions, dissevering them by more than two pages on another subject. This first appeared so strange to a friend that, on first reading a printed copy of the report at the annual meeting, asked me for an explanation, and was on the point of asking the chairman to explain the reason of this, when the motion to adopt was made. The position of the ninth resolution, together with the interposing of two pages of matter, not germane to the first five, with which it more logically and naturally belonged, shows their dilemma and the dernier resort. The position of the seventh and eighth resolution, 'acknowledging the divine favor toward the Society, and commending the Executive Committee for their fidelity and devotedness to its interests,' seem more properly, and logically, to belong some twelve pages farther on, at the close of the report on the business and financial affairs, over which the Committee preside, as well as over the matter of publishing. It is evident, that some kind of an exigency must have forced them out of their proper place and order. But the seventh and the eighth had a mission to perform where they are, and must have been placed there for a particular purpose. They show the adroitness by which the Committee escaped from their dilemma, through their ninth resolution. By this arrangement they avoided a debate which might have sprung up, if the fourth and ninth had been placed in immediate juxtaposition.

Since this letter was sent to the printer, I have read a letter to a Massachusetts Layman, from Rev. Ray Palmer, D. D., of Albany, one of the Special Committee. He gives *his* history and *his* view of the ninth resolution. He says, "that the ninth resolution, as it stands, was moved, in Committee, and adopted, as a substitute for one first offered by an honored member, which did seem to leave the matter, (publishing on slavery,) after all to the discretion of the Executive Committee," and "that his substitute was drawn expressly to exclude the idea." But how does it exclude that idea? As I understand the matter, and on equally good authority, the chief, if not the only objection to the original resolution was, that it required of the Committee, a regard for the widest and best usefulness of this Society *in our Southern States, or in the South*, and that one objection to its language was, that, as they had not used the words, North and South, in their report, it was not wise now to introduce them. Dr. Palmer's substitute differs from the original, *chiefly* and *especially*, in these four words, "throughout our whole country." He does not, and I am sure he will not, assert that the mover of the original resolution accepted his substitute with the understanding that the four words, "throughout our whole country," take from the Publishing Committee any discretionary power, which would have been left in their hands by the original resolution. Nor does he say, that the Committee *adopted* his substitute with that understanding. And if not, then the resolution, as adopted, does not "exclude the idea." Moreover, it is evident that his substitute does not answer his purpose any better than the original, as the southern States are a part of "our whole country." To accomplish his purpose, those words should have been omitted. The fact that he consented to incorporate into his substitute the four words, *throughout our whole country*, shews that his substitute itself was a *compromise*, and that the compromise was *not* in *ideas*, but in *words*. His own statement proves it. Dr. Palmer says, that his object was that "they *should* publish, in accordance with the third and fourth resolutions,"—that he intended "expressly to exclude the idea" of their exercising any "discretion" on that subject. He would forbid the Publishing Committee to make any use of *their own* "*wisdom*" in which the Special Committee express "*great confidence*" on that question of publishing. He intended that they "should publish," even if it should be made evident to them, that by publishing on slavery, the "usefulness of this Society" "throughout" a large part "of our whole country" would be entirely destroyed. The resolution, certainly, says no such thing. There is no

evading the fact, that the ninth resolution was adopted as a *compromise*.

Compromises are often ambiguous, and may be differently interpreted to suit different parties. Hence, President Anderson, a man of no ordinary discernment, refused to sign the report, because "it seemed to him ambiguous, and likely to fail of adjusting the question at issue." So, many cool and discerning men view the matter.

If the ninth resolution is attentively read, and its cautiously studied and circumlocutory language, contrasted with the more simple and direct language of the preceding resolutions, is considered, it will be apparent that they found themselves in a strait place. Instead of using the plain and direct terms, employed in the preceding resolutions, to express their simple ideas, they felt compelled, by the exigency of the case, to employ cautious, circumlocutory and equivocal language, in order to gain unanimity.

But sometimes, even such good men find a moral necessity laid upon them, from which there is no escape, except through such a "wicket gate." Hence they decided on nothing new, in respect to publishing on slavery, nor did they give any instructions, but left it as it had been, "according to the Constitution," as they state in introducing their resolutions. Hence, too, the majority, at the annual meeting, preferred to adopt their report as it was, to making inquiries for explanation, which would have led to a protracted debate, and without any peaceful results. No one, acquainted with the whole subject, on first reading their report, needed any special sagacity to see that the same Committee would need to be convened at the next annual meeting to interpret and explain their language, if it were considered as settling the controversy.

Events soon evinced the wisdom and the necessity of providing for an exigency, which some expected would soon occur, on the first attempt to carry out the "can" and the "ought," as some understood these, to them, all important and all potent words.

Certain religious journals and some political party journals immediately claimed a triumph in this respect, and gave extraordinary prominence to the fourth resolution, and especially to the "can" and the "ought," while they wholly disregarded the ninth. Within six weeks, ecclesiastical bodies, representing a large class of evangelical Christians in several States, and some Auxiliary and Branch Societies, having these party representations before them, protested against the Society's publishing on the subject of slavery, as claimed

by those journals; and this, because they did not agree with these northern brethren in the matter of dealing with a subject so environed with difficulties which many northern Christians appeared to them so imperfectly to understand.

But is it an impossibility for this Society ever to execute, in the absolute sense, the "can" and the "ought"? No. A more christian and reasonable state of feeling on the subject of slavery may ere long exist; and "all evangelical Christians" may be substantially agreed in the wisest manner of dealing with it. Then, if a book or tract can be produced, or a writer, clergyman or layman, can be found wise enough to write one, that shall meet the designs of the Society, and all the requisitions of the Constitution, that book "*can*" and "*ought*" to be published, if it is adapted to do good, by "promoting either vital godliness or sound morality." "And is it too much to ask the man, who says it 'can and ought' to be done, to become the immortal author of such a tract? His name will be canonized in the memories of all evangelical Christians, and the Lord will not fail to give him the blessing of the peace-maker forever."

Respectfully yours,

SETH BLISS.

Boston, Feb. 15, 1858.

LETTER III.

REPORT OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ADOPTED.

CHRISTIAN FRIENDS,—Let me now ask you to consider the question—

Did the Society, by adopting the report of the Special Committee, give instruction to the Publishing Committee as to what they must publish on slavery?

Some have insisted so dogmatically and earnestly that they did, as to demand that the Committee “must obey the instructions or *resign*.” They not only claim that the report contains such instructions, but that the Society, by adopting it, decided that it did, and by adopting it, endorsed the instructions, and moreover, that they gave a new interpretation to the Constitution, and commanded the Executive Committee to obey their supposed instructions, even if it should violate its plainest provisions. This is a palpable assumption—a begging of the question. In the meeting which adopted the report, was a word said, claiming that it contained any instructions? Was any such idea expressed by any one, or was the vote taken under any such impression? The claim that the report contains any instructions binding on the Committee, is not only unauthorized by any thing in the report, but is directly contrary to any inference or intimation found in it. In view of the *facts*, historical and inherent, respecting both the Constitution and this report, and in view of the reasonings based upon these facts, in the two former letters, I submit to candid men whether this is not so.

If the report contained no instructions, nor any new construction of the Constitution, how could the Society, by adopting it, give any instructions? The simple act of adoption could not itself add any thing to the matter adopted;

and after its adoption, the report was just what it was before, and no more nor less.

There were two parties in that meeting. One party was satisfied with the fourth resolution; believing that the "can" and the "ought" in this could be insisted on in the absolute and unqualified sense. The other party were willing to take the fourth, qualified and explained by the ninth and by all the resolutions and the preamble taken together as a whole, and the whole "according to the Constitution," as the majority knew it would be by candid men. There were members in that meeting who designed to inquire of the chairman, why the ninth was added, unless it was designed to explain the intent and the meaning of the fourth; but when they saw the other party so ready to move the adoption of the report, and heard the mover state that he "liked the report, both upon its negative and positive side—for that which it affirms that the Society cannot do, and for that which it affirms that it 'can' and 'ought' to do," they refrained, and wisely perhaps, from any inquiries, as this would probably provoke a long discussion. All hoped for peace; but, perhaps, no peace can be had, unless it be that which may result from RULE or RUIN. The remarks of the mover indicate that the "can" and the "ought" is the hinge upon which he would make the whole to turn. But was not the report adopted unanimously? Yes, yet that unanimous vote was no test of the relative numbers of the two parties in that meeting. It was a vote by acclamation, with no polling of those who had a right to vote. The real test was in the vote for the election of the Executive Committee, which includes the Publishing Committee. In their election, Directors only have the right to vote, and this must be by ballot. One party were quite as much interested to reject one member of the Publishing Committee, as they were to secure the adoption of the report. But in this election his name was erased and other names inserted on only 23, out of the 108 ballots cast. True, many left the meeting after the adoption of the report, but probably, they included about an equal number of both parties. No man who knew who was present, will doubt that a large majority of the members were then, as they still are, opposed to the interpretation of the report which the mover has since maintained in the journal which he edits; or will doubt that the report would have been rejected, or recommitted, if the majority had believed that his construction of it was its true meaning and intent.

I submit to your candid judgment, is it credible, that the majority in that meeting could thus, impliedly, have voted for the adoption of that report, had they believed that it con-

tained *instructions* on slavery contrary to their decided convictions of what the Constitution prohibits the Publishing Committee from issuing, and to obey which would compel them to violate it?

PROCEEDINGS OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE.

In order to a just estimate of the value of their report, a more particular knowledge of their proceedings is due to you. It should be noted that the southern members, friends and patrons, had no representative on that Committee. In this they complain that they have not been dealt with fairly and honorably. It was doubtless owing to inadvertence rather than design. Such a member, familiar with the feelings, prejudices and wants of the southern people, and with the institution of slavery—its duties, evils and responsibilities, could have shed much light on this subject, and essentially aided the Committee in deciding as to what it might be practicable and useful for this Society to do, and especially respecting slavery. Next to the constitutional question, the practicable and useful was *the question* of all others the most important, if they were to advise any thing on the subject. This, for the Society, is more important than theories, declamation, parties and passions. Doubtless the Committee so regarded it. The first meeting of the Committee was held on the 17th of March. This was soon after the decision of the Dred Scott case, which, with the unhappy agitation in regard to Kansas, had intensified sectional and political prejudices, and had identified them, in the minds of many good men, with moral and religious questions. Ten members were present. At their hour of meeting, the Executive Committee assembled at the Tract House to welcome them. After prayer by Rev. Dr. Hawes, the chairman Rev. Dr. Knox, now gone to his reward, in a short address assured them that the whole proceedings of the Society, with the records of the Executive Committee, were open to them, and that they would give all the aid in their power to the fullest examination into all the affairs of the Society, "which he hoped would be thorough."

As they were appointed to "*inquire into and review the proceedings* of the Executive Committee," it was taken for granted that each of the Committees *would be inquired of*; and the day previous, the Executive Committee had appointed the Publishing, Distributing and Finance Committees, each as a Special Committee to answer any inquiries that might

be made in their several departments. The minute of this appointment was placed in the hands of that Committee, and after a brief conference the Executive Committee withdrew, in the expectation that as soon as that Committee were organized, and had decided upon their course of inquiry, they would be called upon for some statement of their "proceedings."

The Committee continued their session four hours that evening, and four or five hours the next morning. They discussed the subject of publishing on slavery, and agreed on resolutions upon the subject. These were discussed, amended, and agreed upon, and were then regarded as substantially settling the main question. At the close of the meeting, by an informal understanding they were laid over till the next meeting, in the hope that the absent members would be present. They appointed a Sub-committee, "to inquire into and review" the financial and business transactions of the Society, and adjourned to meet April 21st. They made no inquiries of the Executive or Publishing Committee, and had no communication with them.

During the interval, the Sub-committee met and examined various communications which had been placed in their hands by those who desired them to make inquiries on particular points, and prepared a list of questions, which they laid before the Secretaries, and spent some three hours in conference with them, making inquiries and explaining their wishes, and at the close of the interview requested them to make a full statement in writing of all the business operations of the Society. When this statement was prepared, they met the Finance Committee and Secretaries in two sessions of some three hours each, making such further inquiries as they desired. They also secured the assistance of three prominent publishers, practical men, to inquire into all the operations in the manufacturing department, and by this careful "inquiry and review" of the whole business proceedings of the Society, reached the satisfactory result in respect to this department which appears in their report.

At the time fixed for the second meeting of the Committee, April 21st, only seven of the fifteen members were present, two of whom were not at the first meeting. There not being a quorum, no business was transacted. The individuals present, at the suggestion of an officer of the Society, had an interview of an hour or two with three members of the Publishing Committee and the Secretary in that department. Neither the Committee nor a majority of them ever met the Publishing Committee; and at that interview the members

present gave the Publishing Committee no intimation of the character of the resolutions agreed upon at the first meeting of the Committee, or that any resolutions had been proposed.

At their third meeting, May 8th and 9th, eleven members were present. They neither made any inquiries of, nor asked for any information from, the Publishing Committee. Nor did the Committee lay any communication before them. At this meeting, the resolutions which had been concurred in at the first meeting were reviewed and somewhat changed; the last three resolutions were added; the report of the Sub-committee on the Society's business transactions, which had been prepared with great labor and care, after much investigation and frequent conference with the officers of the Society, was accepted, and the whole report was adopted and ordered to be printed and presented directly to the Society. It had not been shown by the Special Committee either to the Publishing or the Executive Committee, until heard by them as read at the anniversary; and as its object was to review their own proceedings, it was heard by them in silence.

It is much to be regretted that Rev. Dr. Wayland could not have been present to assist in the "*inquiries*" into the history and grounds of the proceedings of the Publishing Committee for thirty years. He however wrote a letter to them, based, in part, on misapprehensions and on views which he might not have entertained had he not been misled by his known position in regard to dealing with slavery. None of the distinctive positions taken in his letter, which has since been published, were adopted. Widely different views on the interpretation of the Constitution, and views quite in harmony with the Society's general course, were presented to that Committee in another letter apologizing for absence, from Dr. Anderson, of the Baptist church, President of the University at Rochester, who ultimately declined giving his name to their report, chiefly on the ground that it seemed to him "ambiguous, and likely to fail of adjusting the great question at issue." A third paper was also addressed to them from a State Branch Tract Society, with the signature of their President, a member of the Episcopal church, bearing their distinct and earnest protest against the Society's violating the catholic pledges of its Constitution by issuing tracts the South could not receive on the vexed subject of slavery.

Could these three highly esteemed gentlemen have met the Committee in free, kind, and intelligent christian conference, and they and the whole Committee have availed themselves, by personal interviews, of the experience of the members of the Publishing Committee and officers, the final result of such

"inquiry and review" might, perhaps, have united the intelligent judgment of the true friends of the Society in all parts of the country.

These are, in brief, the simple *facts* respecting their inquiries, as a Committee, with the Publishing Committee present before them, into their proceedings.

It has been said, "that the Publishing Committee was with us as long as they chose to be"—"so long as to weary *some* of us." But the simple facts are, that at their first and third meetings, no member of the Executive or Publishing Committee was with them, nor invited to be, although on hand ready to attend. At the time of their second meeting, when there was not a quorum, and they could not transact *business*, three of the Publishing Committee did meet the members present, and, on invitation, also two Secretaries, and were with them some two hours. This was all the interview the Special Committee had with them, for the purpose of inquiring into their proceedings respecting slavery. *Officially*, they had no *interview* either with the Publishing Committee, or the Secretaries. Dr. Palmer was not present at the time appointed for the second meeting, April 21, when there was no quorum. I respectfully ask the Doctor, whether he will say that, at either of the other two meetings which he did attend—the first and the last—either of the Secretaries were present, or were invited to attend? Certainly he will not. It might be right and proper for them to intrude themselves, at any time, into their meetings, or it might not be; but, doubtless, they considered it improper; and that Committee did not *invite* the Publishing Committee to be present, except as was done by those present at this informal meeting.

But there is another fact which will aid in understanding Dr. Palmer's letter, or in modifying his statement on this point. Some members of the Executive Committee were, by invitation of the Sub-committee, which was composed of the lay members of the Special Committee, and the clerical members resident in New York, almost constantly with that Sub-committee, during their laborious inquiries into the business and financial affairs, to explain records and books, and to state all the facts they wished to know relating to that department, and to aid them to correct results. The Doctor, by his statements, seems to make the impression, that the majority of the Committee were before them when they were considering what it was *wise* and *practicable* to publish on slavery, and were inquired of fully on *this question*, which, I suppose, he considers the *main* question, and also into their past proceed-

ings on this subject. Now, if, in order to arrive at correct conclusions respecting the business department, it was necessary that so much of the time and attention of the Finance Committee and Secretaries should be devoted to the Subcommittee, I beg to ask the Doctor, why it was not *as* necessary, in order to arrive at as correct practicable results, that the Publishing Committee should have been as fully and as particularly inquired of respecting their knowledge and experience on the slavery question? But the *facts* are as I have stated. Dr. Palmer thinks, that the Secretaries will admit that they are not "*infallible*," as I have no doubt they will, and most readily. But he must permit me to say, that I have a "very deep conviction" that he is himself a long way from *infallibility*, at least in his late letter, and also that he has, to use his own language respecting the Publishing Committee, "committed some great and disastrous mistakes" in it, and, to repeat his language to the Secretaries, "he will not deem even *my* earnest dissent from many of the statements in his letter, as proof of unkindness or hostility to him personally." Some of the Committee doubtless had incidental interviews, at the Tract House, with the Secretaries, and exchanged views with them, but I speak of *official* interviews, in the sessions of the Committee, and by their invitation. If they felt it their duty to go into the subject of slavery, who could have given facts and considerations more numerous, reliable, or comprehensive, than the Publishing Committee, from their wide correspondence and from their records? From their long experience and practical acquaintance with the subject, they might be presumed to possess valuable knowledge, and as much wisdom as strangers to this experience. If some were afraid that the knowledge and *opinions* of the Publishing Committee would have too much weight, they were competent to judge how much these deserved. As they did express great confidence in their wisdom to carry out their resolutions, and did commend them for fidelity to their trust; so, had they extended their inquiries as particularly into their knowledge and experience on this subject, as they did into their financial and business management, they might have found equal occasion for commending their wisdom in dealing as they had done with slavery. Light on this perplexing subject, undoubtedly, the Committee did desire; but it may be that some of them did not think the light which the Executive Committee could shed on the subject was of any importance in aiding them to a wise conclusion. Men crowded with official duties and responsibilities, as are those who composed that Committee, need no apology for want of time to

inquire into and review, in careful detail, all the proceedings of an institution with such extensive operations and delicate relations. They doubtless did the best which they could in the time which they could devote to the matter and in the circumstances in which they found themselves placed.

Dr. Palmer, in his letter, makes the impression upon the reader, that the Secretaries did earnestly, if not persistently, attempt to impress their individual opinions upon the minds of the Committee. He also states, that the Secretary of the Boston Society did do this by writing to the Chairman. The New York Secretaries have already stated, in public journals, the facts respecting themselves. I deem it proper to state here the reason which I had for writing to the Chairman. Dr. Palmer, on his visit to Boston, immediately after the first meeting of the Committee, called and informed me that they had agreed on the subject of slavery, and embodied the results in certain resolutions. This was stated soon after in several journals, to be the fact. I found that he considered this matter so far settled, that nothing was now wanting to restore peace but the resignation of Rev. Dr. Adams, of his place on the Publishing Committee. I made no inquiries as to particulars in their resolutions. But, I confess, I thought it singular, that, in eight hours, they had inquired into and reviewed the proceedings of the Executive Committee for thirty years, and been able to come to definite results on so complex and difficult a subject; and especially, that the position of Dr. Adams, *placed there by the Society itself*, could be embraced in the proceedings of that Committee, or in their commission. If his resignation was all that was wanted to restore peace, it might be a question deserving his consideration, and, if assured of the fact, I might be of some service in aiding him to a wise decision. I did, therefore, in *my freedom*, most willingly write to the Chairman, stating my information, and its author, inquiring whether the question of Dr. Adams's resignation was acted upon by the Committee, or was before them. I also made other inquiries, concerning matters of which I considered it important for Dr. Adams to be informed, in order wisely to decide the question of his resignation; which, however, I was not aware that he contemplated.

Brethren, here is the substance and the purpose as to my interfering with the "free action" of intelligent and honorable men, who are quite competent to understand, weigh, and wisely use any amount of information from, and views and opinions of, all the Secretaries and Committees in the world. I am not at liberty to give you the Chairman's reply to my

letter in full, but I think he will allow me, in the circumstances, to give you the following extract. This letter is dated April 8, 1857, in which he says :

"I am surprised to learn that *so much* importance was given to Dr. N. Adams' connection with the 'Tract Society.'" "I cannot say that it is *my deliberate opinion* that it is wisest and best for him to resign." "He has given his honest views of the subject of slavery as it struck his mind." "Others may differ with him, as I do, in some aspects of the matter." "I could not take a step that looked so like intolerance towards a christian brother, for a free and lawful expression of opinions on a most perplexing and anxious question, that is at this time heated by passion and inflamed by politics." "I would rather be turned out than resign."

I have given you his very words on this point, consecutively in one connected unbroken paragraph, with his underscoring, and it bears the signature of the Honorable Theodore Frelinghuysen.

"I could not take a step that looks so like *intolerance* towards a christian brother for a *free and lawful* expression of opinion." "*I would rather be turned out than resign.*" This is manly, honorable and Christian. Who will say the words are not worthy the man and the occasion? or that I ought to regret the letter which drew such noble sentiments from such a gentleman and Christian?

Dr. Palmer seems to take it for granted, that the Executive Committee were on trial before them, for alleged official delinquencies in respect to publishing on slavery. Yet he says, "It would be highly improper to admit these officers to any formal part in their deliberations." But if they were on trial, had any charges been *preferred*, with specifications and evidence? Had the *accused* been furnished with these; or were the Special Committee, in considering a question which some think so *vital to freedom*, as to demand the interposition of the Tract Society, to be justified in condemning them *unheard*? If not on trial on *specific* charges, but only on *rumored official* delinquencies, had they not a just claim to appear before their PEERS in character and office, and to be heard in explaining their proceedings, which, it had been alleged, involved them in *official* unfaithfulness? Allegations of this serious and derogatory character had been widely spread over the country, and by religious journals edited by christian pastors. Did not such charges from such sources, give them a claim in justice and in honor, to appear before a body constituted for the special purpose of inquiring into,

and reviewing their proceedings, and this too, as claimed by some, on the subject of slavery;—before a body, evoked too by those journals which had published these allegations, of the spirit and object of which the following specimens will suffice:

“If the Committee of the Tract Society were released from the temptation to suit the *cowardice*—not the *conscience*—of the South, there would at once be freedom of action there.”
 “Let them take care of themselves there, and find out whether they have any religion or not. *And I think they have some.*”
 “Cowards”—“cowardice”—“ears stuffed with cotton”—“bowing down to the South”—“afraid of the slaveocracy”—“succumbing to the cottonocracy of the North”—“reckless to their trust”—“have refused to execute the will of the Society”—“have disobeyed their constituents”—“have been cowardly, and have not proved themselves men for the crisis”—“perverting funds,” etc.

Yet the clerical editors of these religious journals care not to meet those whom they had thus accused, to substantiate these gravely dishonorable accusations before the tribunal which they had demanded.

But what did the Special Committee do, in inquiring into the proceedings of upright and respectable christian men and ministers, whose proceedings were so culpable as to constrain editorial ministers to spread over the land such serious and defamatory charges, and when they were the tribunal which the Editors had so earnestly called for? Did they *call on the Publishing Committee or any other of the officers for any explanation or refutation of these defamatory allegations, or for any light they might have as to publishing on slavery?* The true answer is, They did not, as a Committee, at either of the two only meetings they held, in March and May. A meeting was called in April, at which there was not a quorum, both Dr. Palmer and the honored Chairman being absent, when the members present had an informal interview with three members of the Publishing Committee and the Secretaries. One of the Secretaries soon after called on the Chairman and invited his attention to the catholic principles of the Society, not as an obstacle to issuing tracts on any subject in which evangelical Christians of different names and localities would agree, but to issuing such as would exclude the Society from the fifteen slaveholding States. The report finally adopted by the Committee of Fifteen was not presented by them either to the Publishing or Executive Committee, until it was publicly presented to the Society; and as it purported to be a review

of the action of these Committees, it was heard by them in silence.

The Publishing Committee were justified by the organic law of the Society, by the report of the Special Committee, and by existing circumstances, and I doubt not by their own consciences, in declining to issue "Duties of Masters," as set forth in their Circular, Sept. 10.

They could not have done otherwise, as honest men, worthy the trust reposed in them. Political and sectional prejudices will in time subside. They may well be content to wait, in the consciousness of duty righteously and wisely done, for the verdict of the future.

Let it be understood, by every member and friend of the Society, that the Publishing Committee, in fulfilling their responsibilities to God and the Society's whole constituency, North, South, East, and West, simply, conscientiously, and unanimously declined to issue a proposed Tract, which a large body of evangelical Christians *demand* especially as a prelude to other tracts on slavery; and to which other bodies of evangelical Christians, having equal rights in the Society, *objected*. This, this only was their action, leaving themselves and their successors to be guided by the gracious providence of God in all the future.

Dr. Palmer replies to the question, whether the Special Committee, in their resolutions, considered the probable effects on the minds of the Southern people of the course they "recommended" in publishing on slavery, by saying, "This whole matter was discussed at length." Then he says, that the distinguished Chairman, in speaking of the "evils, and the duties connected with, and resulting from the existence of slavery, said, that if the calm and christian expression of our views in relation to them, would disturb our brethren at the South, it was *our high duty to disturb them*." Whom did the Chairman mean by OUR high duty?—his Committee, or any Northern Christians or Societies, whose responsibilities required this high duty of disturbing our Southern brethren? Did he claim that it was the *high duty* of the Tract Society, and to do this in any and all possible circumstances, and at *all hazards*?—its high duty to do it in circumstances which required it to violate its Constitution?—do it when the doing of it would throw the Society out of "its proper sphere"?—do it, when its tracts would be used by political parties because of "the political aspects of slavery," which they could use, pro and con, for party ends?—do it, when this high duty must be done, if done at all, by this Society, *vi et armis*?—do it, when, however "fraternal and christian the spirit," they

would promote only wrath, anger, and evil speaking,—alienation and civil discord, and not “vital godliness and sound morality”? Could that eminent and honored man have meant that it was the high duty of the American Tract Society, to disturb the Southern members and Christians, by issuing tracts to be “circulated” there in any possible circumstances, and at the hazard and wreck of such precious interests? The known character of the honorable Chairman forbids such a construction of his words. Their report also confutes this, as I have shown. But I will refute Dr. Palmer’s construction of his words with positive, irrefragable proof. Within less than six weeks after that Committee’s report was adopted, and certain religious and party political journals had spread over the country their party version of the report, and given extraordinary prominence to the “can” and the “ought,” in their absolute and positive import, the result was that evangelical Christians and ministers, in their conventions, in several States, raised a decided and emphatic protest against the Society’s attempting such a high duty for them, as a violation of the Constitution,—a breach of covenant,—and declared they could not receive or “circulate” any tracts on the subject of slavery. They were indeed, and with sorrow and grief, disturbed, and these journals, not the Tract Society, had performed this “high duty” of disturbing them. Colporters were fleeing, because the people could not longer confide in them; agents were leaving, because churches, which had always welcomed and liberally responded to their appeals for aid, had closed their doors to them.

The Publishing Committee, in view of facts and circumstances, which did not exist when the report was adopted in May, but were soon developed in bold relief,—after weeks of calm deliberation and earnest prayer, decided, that to issue “Duties of Masters” would not be “on the line of discrimination between what the American Tract Society may and *may not* publish upon the subject of slavery, *according to the Constitution*”—would not be “within its proper sphere”—would not be “dealing even-handedly”—would not be secure from “the political aspects of slavery”—nor would their great wisdom be displayed in issuing it; nor would *such* “action” of the Committee “tend to promote the widest and best usefulness of this Society throughout our whole country.”

What, now, does the honorable, wise and christian man, Theodore Frelinghuysen, say of this decision of the Executive Committee? Soon after their decision was reached, a member of the Executive Committee called on Mr. Freling-

huysen, and informed him of the effects which their report had produced in embarrassing the operations of the Society over large portions of the country. He authorized this member of the Executive Committee to say from him, that if such was the effect, he, as an individual, thought the Publishing Committee were justified in pausing as they did.

Long and intimately as I have known Dr. Palmer, and highly as I esteem him, I suppose the word of both these gentlemen would stand on a par in any Court of Justice, and here I am content to leave this matter in your hands.

But why were the South so disturbed by the prospect of any tract, especially the "Duties of Masters," being issued by this Society? If certain religious journals had treated the officers with fairness, truthfulness, and candor, or with the ordinary courtesy, which all honorable men, and especially christian brethren, acknowledge due to each other—if the Special Committee, which they evoked, had not been appointed, or if their report had been treated with the fairness, truthfulness and charity, which was due to its respected authors, and to the cause, the South would not have been so alarmed and disturbed. Hundreds of Christians and Masters had read one or all the treatises in that small book. They did not object, generally, to these when they *were published*, by request, some ten years previous; but they objected *now*, because that book was to be the *first* and the *forerunner* of what these journals boastingly informed them was to be issued *on the new line and policy*.

Respectfully yours,

SETH BLISS.

Boston, Feb. 18, 1858.

LETTER IV.

"DUTIES OF MASTERS."

CHRISTIAN FRIENDS,—Some seven or eight months before the Special Committee met, the Publishing Committee had begun to collect the matter for this book, in accordance with what they had stated at the previous annual meeting, viz. "That if there were tracts on duties and evils connected with slavery, in which Christians, North and South, would agree, they knew of no reason why they should not be approved." This was then declared to be satisfactory by those who insisted on the appointment of a Special Committee of inquiry. At the time of the meeting of the Special Committee, members of the Publishing Committee had a hope, that Duties of Masters might be such a tract, and they evinced their hope by what they had done in preparing it. What new responsibilities did their report devolve on the Publishing Committee? It devolved on *them*, as the Constitution does, and as the Society has always done, the responsibility of *judging what specific tracts could be consistently issued*. Even as to the propriety of issuing the tract on the "Duties of Masters," the Committee of Fifteen refrained from expressing any opinion. They recommended general principles of action, which they hoped might harmonize the Society and the christian community.

On receiving and considering that report, weighing at one view its several recommendations, guards and limitations, the Publishing Committee, desiring to give all possible deference to the judgment of their highly esteemed brethren, found no difficulty in acting according to their own understanding of the principles suggested: the sum of which is, wisely and discreetly to present scriptural views of these "duties" and "evils" in a manner that shall not be identified with political

or sectional strife, and shall be consistent with the catholic principles of the Society, and its best interests throughout all our boundaries. That these duties or evils are to be formally announced as growing out of slavery, and thus discussed in specific tracts, is not expressed in the resolutions; and the difficulty, if not impossibility, of now issuing such tracts, and yet avoiding the "political aspects" of slavery, has been already referred to. The Publishing Committee are wisely, according to their best discretion, with a proper regard to time and circumstances, to present scriptural views of these and all other moral duties, evils and vices. This they have ever endeavored to do. This they certainly have done in issuing all that God has revealed on this subject, in the very words of inspiration.

An insuperable obstacle to issuing such specific tracts on these "evils" or "duties" immediately arose, as already intimated, from the language employed by the Special Committee in the latter part of their fourth resolution; which,—heralded as it was as an anti-slavery triumph, and as indicating a radical change in the course to be pursued by the Society in reference to slavery, and by which it would make itself a party in the pending political strife,—created such alarm and opposition as greatly complicated the difficulties previously existing.

In the present excited state of the public mind, there has been a confused and almost inexplicable diversity of opinion as to the tract "Duties of Masters." In itself, the tract is objectionable to anti-slavery Christians, as tacitly sanctioning the system of slavery; yet many such demand its issue as *the first of a series* which shall ultimately condemn slavery; while a great body of Christians at the North, and all at the South, unite in protesting against the Society's entering on any formal discussion of a subject so bitterly controverted among the followers of Christ.

The language of Northern partisan journals, boasting of the Report of the Special Committee and its adoption, as an anti-slavery triumph, furnished an occasion for opposing Southern journals to seize on these Northern party views and interpretations as confirming their own fears and predictions, and to spread these views all over the South, exaggerated by party zeal, to influence the already chafed sensitiveness of those who lead public sentiment, and thus put it out of the power of Christians there to circulate any thing on the subject of slavery, bearing the imprint of the Society. Those Southern journals saw in "Duties of Masters" the beginning of what Northern journals claimed as the new line of policy.

Their experience for twenty years had led them to believe that these journals and their party would give no peace to the Society, until another, and another, up to the tenth and twentieth tract should succeed the first, and each more positive, arrogant and offensive than its predecessors, until they should be such as Southern members neither could nor ought to endure; thus compelling them to yield their equal and pledged rights.

THE PUBLISHING COMMITTEE JUSTIFIED IN THEIR DECISION.

That Committee have been severely censured for their decision not to issue "Duties of Masters," as stated in their Circular of Sept. 10th, in which they briefly state the facts and reasons in view of which they decided that case. I must think that if those who complain of that decision had all the facts before them, as the Committee had them, and with their responsibilities, they would not judge them so severely.

The Committee, in their Circular of Sept. 10, announcing their decision in respect to this book,—after mentioning the hope cherished by themselves and others at the time of the meeting of the Special Committee; that it might prove acceptable in the South, and that the whole subject had since assumed a new aspect, from the interdict of the authors to its being issued at present with a Northern imprint,—proceed to state: "From Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, from Alabama, Louisiana, and Tennessee, we hear but one testimony, as borne by State Branches and Auxiliaries, by the Society's officers, General Agents, Superintendents, and Colporters, by ecclesiastical bodies, and by the religious press. Over the South we have now a virtual suspension of collections, and if the present distrust and alienation but remain, there must speedily ensue a withdrawal of colporters and distribution through our Southern field. We must surrender all the Southern and Southwestern States. To proceed, is thus to palsy one whole side of our Institution.

"The Publishing Committee therefore voted, with entire unanimity, to arrest the issue of the work that had been before them, confidently believing that their action in the premises would commend itself to the Society, under the phases which the subject has assumed; and the Executive Committee united in sustaining this as the only present action conservative of all the interests, and just to all the parties involved.

"To the farther developments of God's good providence, and to the guidance of his Spirit, promised where reverently and

humbly implored, the Committee now refer this question, meanwhile "seeking the things that make for peace," and aiming to secure the "fruit of righteousness sown in peace of them that make peace."

That decision related only to the *tract* before them, and not to what might hereafter be offered on the subject, and under different circumstances. They judged of that, in the circumstances then existing, just as they do of all others offered them. Their decision in this case was in harmony with the principles which they had previously stated at the annual meeting in 1856,—already quoted,—and which leading gentlemen of the opposite party declared on that occasion to be *satisfactory*.

The most intelligent Southern brethren, clerical and lay, had told them, in love and confidence, "that the community among whom we dwell have been so reproached and goaded by what we regard misrepresentation and abuse from Northern presses, and such is the prevailing dread of incendiary documents, that for the Society's Colporters to be supplied with any tract on the subject of slavery would create universal alarm; and that if this subject is to be agitated at all in the Society's publications, there can be no access to the people of these States. Many of our brethren at the North are evidently misinformed as to the nature of these insuperable obstacles. Let them visit or communicate with their warm-hearted intelligent Southern brethren, one in Christ with themselves, and seeking the same salvation for bond and free, and it may be better understood why a spark on this subject is dreaded, and how every pressure upon the Society from the North to publish on this subject, but increases the alarm." The Publishing Committee were not called either to justify or condemn the views of any parties in this controversy; but testimony from all parts of the South and South-west, confirmed by a general cessation of coöperation instant upon the action at the Society's last anniversary, made it unquestionable that to issue the tract then under consideration might close the door of access to eleven millions of souls and half our moral desolations, and at the same time sunder the Society's constituency at the North. To take action which might lead to such results, with no warrant from the Society itself, they unanimously judged would be an abuse of the trust reposed in them; and in this view the consideration of the proposed tract was discontinued.

By publishing "Duties of Masters," in such circumstances, the Committee would not have justified "the great confidence," which the ninth resolution expressed "in their action

in carrying out the principles of their resolutions." Wisdom, especially in such circumstances, and with such interests at hazard, requires TIME to collect facts and opinions from different and distant sources; and TIME to consider and weigh all the facts bearing on the wide interests at stake;—and then it requires action wisely adapted to the facts and circumstances found to exist.

UNREASONABLE HASTE DEMANDED.

Soon as the Society had adopted the report, the senior Secretary was urged, by an eminent Pastor, immediately to issue "Duties of Masters"; for, said he, "I have *another ready* for you." But others, and the majority of those who voted for the report, expected no such thing done, especially in such heat and haste. Hence impatience of delay soon became passion, and certain journals imputed the most dishonorable motives for this delay, and in such opprobrious language as "bowing down to the South," "treachery to the members," "betraying the North," "succumbing to the South," "fear of Northern cottonocracy," etc.; and arrogantly demanded, "OBEY OR RESIGN."

What kind of Tracts ought the Society to issue in reference to this subject? On this point there is no unity of opinion among those in the Northern States who claim that something must be issued. Some of them declare that this one tract on the "Duties of Masters" is *all they want*. Others insist on its being issued as *the first of a series*. Others loudly protest against this tract as written by Southern authors and tacitly sanctioning slavery, and claim that the Society should take a vastly higher ground and to array itself against the system.

The Publishing Committee and officers *are ready to publish on this, as on all other subjects, all that promises usefulness, and in which the great body of evangelical Christians are agreed*. To go further than this, they believe is to violate the good faith and the fundamental catholic principles of the Society, which have been everywhere publicly avowed.

But Dr. Palmer says, "My deep conviction is, that they committed a great and most disastrous mistake in this decision"—"that suppressing 'Duties of Masters' was the first wrong step." With due respect to the Doctor, let me say, that a considerable number of cool headed and judicious members and friends of the Society have a "very deep conviction," that the Constitution has not placed the decision of

this question in the "very deep conviction," of any one man, and that had the Committee put forth that tract, at once, as he argues they ought to have done, it would have been, if not their "first wrong step," the committing of a great and most disastrous mistake.

Dr. Palmer here assumes, 1st. That those "really good christian men who live in the midst of slavery," and whose opinions have been expressed, are *individuals* merely, scattered here and there, while he overlooks the fact, that many of them are not only members of the Society, but intelligent, conscientious men, representing large classes of evangelical Christians, and capable of forming a correct opinion, and as much entitled to have their opinion respected, as he himself is to have his opinion respected. 2d. He assumes, that *after* the report was adopted, the Publishing Committee sent copies of "Duties to Masters" to the South, and then waited for leave from *individuals* to issue that book. But he is utterly mistaken in this matter. The simple *fact* is, copies of that book, in proof, had been sent *months before*, and not *after* the report was adopted, to several judicious officers and friends of the Society North and South, a large majority of whom expressed serious doubts of the propriety of issuing it, others remonstrated against it, and a State Branch Society addressed their formal protest to the Committee of Fifteen, which was laid before them at their first meeting. The Executive officers did nothing to prevent the acquiescence of the whole country in the report of that Committee. But the first five resolutions separately were sent out by steam or telegraph as an anti-slavery triumph; and as fast as steam brought back returns from Richmond, from Raleigh, from Charleston, from New Orleans, from officers, general agents, friends, and ecclesiastical bodies in all parts of the Southern country; they showed great alarm and agitation, causing a sudden stagnation of the Society's labors, which have not yet by any means been fully resumed.

Dr. Palmer argues that "had that book been promptly issued in a week or two after the meeting, as it might easily have been, it would have interpreted to the South the nature of the new action proposed."

"The new action proposed." But this new action was then claimed and proclaimed as an anti-slavery triumph; and Southern members and Christians were told they must submit to it, *nolens, volens*. *In this was the bar*. Had certain journals abstained from claiming a triumph, and been fair and candid in interpreting the report of the Special Committee, the South would not have been so disturbed, and might not have put up that bar.

Thousands of intelligent christian men, North and South, have been led, by a calm and comprehensive view of all the interests involved in this decision, to a "very deep conviction" that the decision was reasonable—wise—demanded by the circumstances, and in entire harmony with the requirements of the Constitution, and the report of the Special Committee. Had not the Southern members just as good a claim to be consulted in this matter as the Northern members have? Do they not know as much about what kind of tracts they can approve and circulate as the northern members? Are they not as deeply interested—are they not to be as greatly benefited, or as seriously injured by these tracts? Is not their knowledge, judgment and conscience, entitled to as much respect? Does the Doctor know that Bishop Mead and Rev. C. C. Jones, D. D., in the circumstances in which they found their Southern brethren, lay and clerical, in June last, thought it their duty to interdict the Society's publishing their treatises at present; or does he know, that the Presbytery to which Dr. Young belonged, refused to approve his treatise? The Doctor says, if, instead of delay, the tract had been promptly issued, "the great agony would have been well over, and the Society kept quietly on its way." I have all due respect for the Doctor's judgment, but the measure of my respect must be graduated by the extent and accuracy of his knowledge in the case; and in the present case I am constrained to accord more respect and confidence to the judgment of the well known and honored Reverend gentlemen whom I have named, and who have long and usefully resided in the South, and are extensively familiar with the best men there, and both of whom are known and honored for their long and arduous labors and sacrifices for the bondmen. I am also constrained to respect and confide more in the judgment in this case of the hundreds of the intelligent and devoted ministers, and the thousands of evangelical Christians whom they represent, and who so promptly united in those earnest protests, from several States, against the Society's entering upon any new line or policy in regard to slavery.

Again the Doctor says, "I am well persuaded that there are many of the friends of the Society at the South, who would be glad to see the duties and the sins originating in slavery as it exists exhibited in a christian way." I presume he would accept "*Duties of Masters*" as the right tract for this purpose. But is the "*persuasion*" of Dr. Palmer any *evidence* on this point? He admits that "there are really christian men who live in the midst of slavery"; although the religious journal which sympathises with his views says,

"Let them take care of themselves there, and find out whether they have any religion or not."

Many of "the really good men in the South" have expressed their "very deep conviction," in their earnest protest, decidedly against his opinion on this subject. Besides, I have not yet learned that any of the "really good men who live in the midst of slavery," or any one of "the good friends of the Society in the South," have complained, in any form, that the decision of the Publishing Committee "has done them great injustice or placed them in a false and injurious position," as he alleges. Then, again, at the North there is a considerable number of good friends of the Society who have a "very deep conviction" that the decision of that Committee was eminently wise; and that had it been the reverse of what it is, "great injustice" would have been done those Southern members, friends and patrons, and they would have been placed "in a false and injurious position." Between these two opposite opinions, that of one party represented by Dr. Palmer on one hand, and that of "the really good christian men who live in the midst of slavery" on the other, and who are familiar with the subject and its difficulties, could the Committee hesitate, as to which was deserving of the most consideration, in deciding the question, especially when it was so evident that these conflicting opinions demonstrated, that "Duties of Masters" was not "calculated to receive the approbation of all evangelical Christians," either in the South or in the North, and could not be circulated in the South; and that the report of the Special Committee itself, did not justify their issuing that tract, in existing circumstances?

But the Doctor says, "it was a golden opportunity of harmonizing *every thing* that was thus unwisely lost." But has he sufficient prescience on this question to pronounce so confidently? Some observation has convinced me, that while he, and some others, might be contented with one such tract as "Duties of Masters," a class of men who act with him on this subject would have at once insisted on issuing other tracts, justly offensive to the South, the circulation of which, at the South, Dr. Palmer himself would not desire. They are a class who sympathise with him as far as he goes; but not having his stronger conservatism to restrain them, they would push forward on his line to the extremest point of radicalism and impracticability.

The spirit and substance of much of what the Doctor says under this head in his letter, I regret to say, seems to mean, that if the Publishing Committee had only promptly issued

the book then under consideration—sprung the trap on the South—stole the march—caught the South napping—and pounced upon them with a volley of “Duties of Masters” from the whole battalion of Colporters—why, the American Tract Society “would have seized a golden opportunity of *harmonizing every thing*”; and, as he says, “it would have kept quietly on its way.” I need not say that no religious union benevolent Society “can” or “ought” to do any such thing.

Dr. Palmer says, “the cry of abolitionism has, naturally enough, alarmed the South, and set them to fight a phantom.” But he adds, “I hope it has not been deliberately raised with any such intent.” I answer, it was raised by the leaders of the Doctor’s party, by claiming the supposed instructions as an anti-slavery triumph. As to the “deliberation” in which this has been done there may be a question.

“The world,” he says, “despises cowardice.” Yet he would frighten the Publishing Committee into a display of courage against the South!!! He would attempt to frighten it by threatening the “loss of a vast amount of sympathy and coöperation at the North.” But even with this terror before them, the American Tract Society must have courage to do RIGHT, by a faithful regard to its plighted faith, as it has covenanted to do in its Constitution, *at the expense of whatever loss may result from thus doing.*

From the tenor of the Doctor’s remarks on this topic, I judge, that he thinks the Tract Society, if not its kindred institutions, has already progressed to as large operations, and to the receipt of as large an amount of funds, as is safe for one Society to manage. This may be so, since by its failure to issue “Duties of Masters” it “has lost the golden opportunity of harmonizing every thing” and every body. Perhaps it has already secured so many friends and patrons whose confidence it can retain, as to warrant it in expecting the funds necessary to enable it to “go quietly on its way,” in peace and harmony, prosecuting the good work for which it was formed. Let those who cannot work harmoniously with it, as it is and has been for thirty years, direct their wisdom and zeal to forming another Society which can supply its lack of service, and which may be better able to “harmonize every thing,” and put “the really good men who live in the midst of slavery” in the “right position” toward their Society.

Again he says, “There is a short way, it seems to me, of putting the construction of the Constitution beyond all doubt. The Executive officers assert, that it was the intention of the framers of the Constitution, that the subject of slavery should

forever be let alone ; and that it cannot therefore be touched, without a violation of the Constitution, as interpreted by their well known intent." "See, then, in what a dilemma these officers place themselves." *This dilemma the Doctor has made for himself.* Neither the officers, the framers, nor the Constitution, have made any such dilemma. 1st. The officers have never asserted what he charges. 2d. For four years past, or since it was publicly charged, that "the Society had not published a *sentence, line, or word* on slavery," some of the officers have had by them a copy of carefully collated passages, from the earliest to the later publications, embracing more than one hundred selections, in which slavery and the slave trade are alluded to. This some connected with the Society have shown to individuals, read in public meetings, explained them, and commented on them, *expressly* to prove, that the allegation of SILENCE is *false* ; and also to prove, that the Constitution requires, that on this, as on any other topic, we publish, as has been stated in previous letters, up to that line of *agreement and harmony* among "all evangelical Christians." 3d. The officers have asserted and maintained, in public and in private, that this view is the *true* meaning of the *Constitution*, and the *true* intent of the framers. Has not a cry of some kind "so alarmed" the Doctor, on this point, as has "set him to fighting a phantom."

He says, "The Society is a kind of impersonation of practical Christianity, and it must maintain its consistency as such ;" therefore it must issue "Duties of Masters." This depends on *what kind* of "impersonation of practical Christianity" it assumes to be. It has defined and settled *its own kind* by its Constitution, to be an *agreement in harmony* with "all evangelical Christians" ; and just so far as they *agree*, and *in harmony* represent practical Christianity, it represents their *united* views, and is their united impersonation, and no further ; and this is all it has undertaken to be, or obligated itself to be. In order to "maintain its consistency as such," it must abide by its own organic law. To violate this, is to forfeit "its consistency" as "such an impersonation."

It has been said by others, that "our evangelical protestant Christianity has *settled* the question, that the relation itself of master and slave is an immorality, and *therefore* this Society is obligated to publish tracts condemning it." That is, the Society must become an organ of "*anti-slavery reform*," as the Committee say, in their second resolution, "it may not." It must attack slavery in its "political aspects," which their fourth resolution forbids ; it must go beyond "the moral duties and moral vices growing out of slavery," and attack

slavery itself, which the whole report of the Special Committee, adopted by the Society, implies that it may not. The question of doing this has not been before the Society. It will be time to argue it, when it comes up. It will then be appropriate to consider how far the Society is bound to publish what it cannot *circulate* "throughout our whole country." At present, the introduction of this new question only distracts and confuses the minds of those who attempt to reason on the question actually under consideration. The Society has bound itself not to publish what cannot be *circulated* "in any and every part of our country." There can be no claim on the Society to do that, which neither its Constitution nor divine Providence permits it to do.

Some evangelical Christians think, that immersion, in the circumstances in which the ordinance is sometimes administered, tends to immorality. I have heard an evangelical minister maintain, that infant baptism tended to immorality, and for proof of this he appealed to the lax condition of pedobaptist churches in Continental Europe, and especially in Germany. According to Dr. Wayland's theory of the Constitution, the Society is obligated to publish against both forms of a divine ordinance; for his doctrine is, that the Society has no moral right to suppress any doctrine which bears on morality. The time was, during the reformation in Germany, when baptism was a political party question, as well as a theological one. Suppose the question of baptism should become thus identified, in this country, with a political party, could this Society publish tracts condemning either form of the ordinance of baptism, which one or the other party would not use for its party ends?

Slavery is now identified with political and sectional parties in the United States. Could "*Duties of Masters*" be *circulated* "in any and every part of our country"—and especially when it is expected to be the forerunner of others on the subject, which one or the other of these parties would so value for its bearings on the "political aspects of slavery" as to use it for party purposes?

Respectfully yours,

SETH BLISS.

Boston, Feb. 23, 1858.

LETTER V.

WHAT HAS BROUGHT THE SOCIETY INTO ITS PRESENT DIFFICULTIES?

CHRISTIAN FRIENDS,—For nearly thirty years, this Society had steadily prosecuted its work with enterprise and energy; entering every field of usefulness which Divine Providence opened to it, in our own country and in foreign lands, until it was, according to its ability, “diffusing a knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of sinners,” in more than one hundred and twenty languages and dialects, spoken by the most populous nations of the earth and the dwellers on distant islands,—belting the globe itself with heavenly light and love for benighted millions.

While thus extending its beneficent labors abroad, it was placing in the families of the thirty millions of our own population between seven and eight hundred thousand volumes annually. These were borne to the families around the older centres of religious privileges—to those in “high ways and hedges”—to the families of the pioneers and founders of new and rising States, destitute of good religious reading, and very often of the Bible. These treatises on practical and experimental religion, and teaching the soundest morality, are the best which the religious literature of evangelical Christendom, past and present, furnishes. They are published also in all the languages spoken in our country, and are adapted to the highest interests of all classes and conditions of men, from childhood to old age. With these invaluable treatises has gone the Bible itself, and millions of tracts for the way-farer, the wanderer, and the casual reader, at home or abroad, and often with a word of exhortation and a prayer, to quicken the conscience, arouse the intellect,—elevate and sanctify the soul. Its enterprise, energy, prudence and mani-

fest usefulness, had so gained the confidence and affection of the christian public, that they cheerfully furnished the means to sustain and extend its labors, until it had become one of the most useful and important agencies for evangelization, education, and civilization in our country.

As already stated, it had published in respect to slavery, up to the requirement of its Constitution. But about four years ago, when the controversy about slavery became more distinctly identified with sectional strife and party politics, a religious journal, edited with ability, and having a large circulation, chiefly among Congregationalists, began first to censure the Society for its supposed *silence* in regard to slavery. When it was found that this was a false accusation, then it began arrogantly to demand, that it should publish *more positively* and *decidedly* on this subject. It has persisted in this demand, speaking of the officers of the Society and their administration of its affairs in such opprobrious language, as no gentleman, and especially no christian minister, should allow himself to use toward his brethren,—and imputing motives to them, which, if true, must destroy their reputation, and expel them from all offices of trust and responsibility. This journal was soon followed by three or four other Congregationalist papers, often copying from it censorious and defamatory articles, with no improvement in their bitter tone and destructive influence.

These journals are all edited by pastors of one denomination, among whom they largely circulate, and who constitute a large class of the constituency and patrons of the Society. After a time, a very few New School Presbyterian and Baptist papers began to follow in their train.

I admit the right of these, or any other journals, to inquire into, and criticise the doings of our benevolent Societies, and to censure, if they find occasion. But when they undertake to do this, are they not bound by the common law of christian courtesy, candor and truth, as well as by their own personal relation as members—by a regard to the constituency which they represent, and by the important interests involved, before they make such serious allegations, and impute such dishonorable motives, to inquire of those who must know what the *facts* are, before they recklessly cast abroad in the community such firebrands, to inflame passion, excite prejudices, promote discord among brethren, and destroy confidence. But not one of these Editors has ever taken the trouble to make these inquiries.

What have been the effects upon the Society, of this unholy crusade, pursued so pertinaciously for four years? Just what

it would have been upon the reputation and standing of any respectable man, living in the community where these journals circulate. if they had pushed a similar course toward him. His reputation, and the confidence of men in him, are destroyed, and he must appeal to the law to protect him, or be content to be a broken down man.

Thus they have extensively weakened the confidence of thousands in the integrity and fidelity of the officers, and of course, in the Society, by exciting prejudices, crippling its resources, limiting its operations, weakening its moral power, and in too many cases, especially in New England, closing the pulpit to its agents. To recover itself from this extensive mischief, to its former progressive usefulness, will require, at least, the labors and prayers of one generation.

How does this affect high minded and honorable men, especially of other evangelical denominations? As a matter of fact, known to myself and others, they begin seriously to ask, of what use is it to attempt longer to sustain such a union catholic Society, based on *agreement* in the essential truths of our common evangelical Christianity, and obligated by the express provisions of its Constitution to keep its operations within this stipulated sphere?

If this mutual bond, on which we became members, say these men, is violated in its plainest provisions, what security have we that our rights and privileges in it will be respected; that the express object to promote which we became members, can be accomplished; or that any of our national union Societies can be preserved from subversion to some party end?

If we cannot rely, say they, on the obvious meaning and intent of the Constitution, for the protection of our rights as members, why mock our hopes by *having one*? If one party can honorably repudiate or pervert its plainest provisions, in order to accomplish its purpose, why may we not *as* honorably repudiate our own individual bond to pay an honest debt, or fulfil a mercantile or a partnership contract?

Should the American Bible Society publish Bibles *with* notes and comments, it must by this one act break itself up, because it would be a gross violation of *its* Constitution. But this would be a no more violation of this contract, than it would be for the American Tract Society to publish tracts which are not "calculated to receive the approbation of all evangelical Christians." The words "all evangelical Christians," are just as sacredly binding in the Constitution of the one, as the words "without note or comment," are in the other. We are not willing to belong to a Society so regardless of its covenant obligations.

If members of the Society, while editing widely circulated religious journals, representing one large class of Christians united in this mutual covenant and pledge, will pursue the course they have toward this Society, in sowing discord, strife and alienation among its members and patrons, how can it prosecute the work for which we united in it, or long survive the storm? Has mutual confidence in christian brethren expired—the “charity that suffereth long and is *kind*” died out of our common evangelical Christianity? Must we be compelled to disregard the wishes, the mutual rights and earnest remonstrances of our Southern brethren in Christ and in this Society,—violate our faith, plighted to them on our common altar—to our common Master in heaven—to the destitute millions of our common country, and to future generations; and this, to gratify another party, by publishing tracts on one controverted topic, and which cannot be circulated “throughout our whole country”; and, by doing this, compel a large constituency to abandon the Society in which they are pledged equal rights, and close its labors among ten millions of our population? Is one party of Christians in this national union so much the superior, as to justify them in forcing the Society into a position which must result in such a calamity?

How can honorably minded christian men, looking calmly, as Christians, on this subject, reason otherwise, or be willing longer to coöperate in a union Society, with brethren who treat them and the Society in this manner, or will allow such a spirit to control its counsels? Will our Episcopal, Reformed Dutch, Old School Presbyterian, and thousands in the New School, Baptist, and in other communions, any longer walk with us? Shall the evangelical Christianity of the United States, at this day, thus confirm the boast of the Roman Catholic Church, that the Protestant religion has no unity in any essential truth, but produces strifes and discord—a boast which she uses with such potent and sad effect upon her unthinking masses?

“Based on that divine principle of association, which Christianity originated, the American Tract Society has hitherto been the demonstration and the living proof that the tribes of Israel are one Israel, and that amid all sectional and political and denominational differences, holding the Mead, calling upon the name of one and the same Lord, loving Him, and loving all who love Him, **EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS ARE ALL ONE.** Bound together in this Society, in the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace, they have for more than thirty years awakened joy among the angels of God, diffused peace

and good will on earth, and proclaimed glory to God in the highest."

Is not the sacrifice of such a Society, too great a price to pay for the gratification of a party in fellowship with it? Will not the good men of the next generation learn, with amazement and grief, that its members had allowed it, with the accumulated resources and confidence, love, prayers and dying benefactions of one generation of fellow disciples of one Lord and one faith, to sacrifice such needy and whitening fields of usefulness, for the sake of publishing tracts on one complex and controverted topic of morals, when *so inevitably* identified with political and sectional strife?

A PRIVATELY CIRCULATED LETTER.

This last question brings me to the consideration of a letter which I received since commencing this. It is a printed document of sixteen pages, addressed to the Secretaries of the American Tract Society, and copies are sent to other officers, and to some of its prominent friends. It is not yet published for general circulation. It is ably written and in behalf of several members of the Society,—men of high respectability and worth,—competent to state and defend their views.

The highly respected writer, in a note prefixed to his letter, enjoins those who receive a copy to regard it as "*strictly confidential*," and requests that any communications respecting it be addressed privately to himself. If that gentleman, at the time he sent me a copy, had also sent me the address of all those friends to whom he sends copies, I should feel bound in honor to send any comments I choose to make upon the paper to him *and to them* confidentially. This he has not chosen to do. When he addresses a letter to me as an officer of a public institution, whose interest I am set to care for and promote, and when by his letter he privately circulates ideas and views which, in my judgment, are virally injurious to the institution, and at the same time prohibits me from attempting to counteract those views in the minds of our friends to whom he sends the letter, I can admit no such prohibition, as reasonable or just, in law or equity, or authorized by any law of courtesy or honor, any more than I should had he sent to myself and others a similar letter censuring me for something respecting my private character which he thought deserving of reproof and exposure. With all due respect to my friend and christian brother, and to his associates, long

known and respected by me, I proceed to make such brief comments as my limited space will permit.

He states, that two years ago the question discussed by these gentlemen was, "Ought the American Tract Society to publish further at present on the moral duties and moral evils arising out of slavery; and with scarce an exception, it was emphatically decided in the negative." Last autumn the question was again taken up, and was changed to this form, viz. "If it be morally certain that the entire South will fall off from the Society, provided we now publish on the subject of slavery, ought such publication to be made?" It was decided in the affirmative. Had I been a party in the discussion of that question, I should have moved the following amendment, viz., provided, that there are *no members* of the Society living in the South; and that a competent ecclesiastical tribunal has decided, that there are no *evangelical Christians* living in the South; and provided, also, that a competent judicial tribunal has decided, that the Constitution of the Society does not protect, and was not designed to protect, the equal rights of a *minority*. The question *assumes* these essential and vital points at issue. It assumes that Northern members *only* have any *rights* in the Society, and that they *only* have the right to decide this question, and to control the Society. This idea pervades the letter, and, as it seems to me, vitiates the entire argument by which the writer attempts to prove that "Duties of Masters," or a similar tract, ought to have been issued immediately after the last annual meeting. While I highly respect the writer and his associates, he must permit me to say, frankly and decidedly, that I cannot respect their argument or their decision. It is too palpably a false issue, and the result of false premises.

The writer says, "This entire revolution in our sentiments has arisen from the reference of this subject to an Investigating Committee, and the circumstances of this reference." "The spirit of that transaction pointed, (as we felt,) to only *one* result, viz. that of your carrying promptly into effect whatever conclusions the Society should reach, touching the points thus referred." But the first question here to decide is, what are the conclusions which the Society reached? The argument of the letter seems to me to be based mainly on the *assumption*, that the Special Committee were *authorized* to instruct the Publishing Committee, and did instruct them, as to publishing on slavery, and that the Society *did*, by adopting their report, *obligate* them to obey the instruction, irrespective of the Constitution or the rights of the *minority*. I deny that the Society has reached any such con-

elusion. The writer admits that the report of the Special Committee was a *compromise*. But in respect to what did they make the compromise? As I have already shown, it was made in their ninth resolution. One party stand on the *obvious* meaning of the Constitution. The other party demand that which, if done, violates its plainest provisions. There is no evading this fact. The writer, also, seems to assume, that *all* the Northern members and *all* Northern evangelical Christians consent to the Society's publishing tracts on slavery; or at least, that those members in the North who do not consent to this, whether in the majority or the minority, have no rights guaranteed to them by the Constitution,—that whichever party happens, at any time, to be a majority on a disputed question, may rightfully trample on the Constitution, and thus on the rights of a minority,—and this in a Society of christian brethren united to promote "sound morality."

On carefully reading this letter, I much regret to say, that I cannot avoid the impression, that another and a more potent change which has occurred within two years past, has more influence in "the entire revolution in the sentiments" of these respectable gentlemen, than any "transactions" of the Special Committee; and has also had no small influence in their interpretation of those transactions—a change, too, which does lie without the proper sphere of this Society, in as much as it respects "the political aspects of slavery."

This, as it seems to me, underlies the whole argument of the letter, and nullifies its force.

Those who know the relations of some these gentlemen to certain political events of the last two years, cannot think it strange, if these events should have had such an influence on their judgment, as they have had on the judgements of other good men, who now acknowledge it.

The writer of this letter says, he speaks in behalf of those associated with him, and at their request, but with the understanding, that he alone is responsible for the reasonings presented, while the conclusion which he reaches is held in common with them and himself.

What is stated under the eighth head reveals, as I judge, the animus, and is the key to the whole. It shows that the views and feelings of one political party, have been acting "in the minds and hearts" of members of the Society, have influenced them to make this demand for tracts on slavery, and now impelling them to demand that the Executive Committee shall publish such tracts without delay.

WHAT POLITICAL VIEWS AND FEELINGS DEMAND OF THE
TRACT SOCIETY.

This is stated in the following extract from this letter:

"VIII. Politics ought certainly to be kept out of the Tract Society; but it is not possible to shut out from the hearts and minds of its members certain events of recent occurrence.—the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, the invasion of Kansas by armed men for the purpose of controlling her elections, and other transactions of a like nature. These measures have been adopted for the avowed purpose, not of protecting slavery in the old States, but of extending its domain into new and virgin territories. Commencing with political movements, they have gone beyond the region of politics; and are regarded by a vast majority of Christians at the North and West, as great *moral* wrongs. Under the influence of this feeling, persons came forward two years ago and demanded that the Tract Society should speak more freely than it had done, concerning the entire system of slavery in which these measures had originated. The Executive officers refused. The subject was referred to the judgment of the Society; and that judgment was thus far in favor of the Officers, that no attack was to be made on slavery in its "political aspects"; and thus far in favor of the other party, that tracts on the duties and moral evils arising out of slavery, can be prepared and ought to be published. Every hour's delay in carrying out this Resolve, brings upon you the pressure and momentum of that great sense of moral wrong, which gave rise to the reference. It places you in a false position. You are no advocates of slavery, no apologists for the course pursued in Kansas. And yet while you delay, that indignant feeling which prevails so widely among the churches of the North and West, will to some extent enter into the question. It will demand that the Resolve of the Society should be carried out into its plain and legitimate results—that what can be done and ought to be done, the Executive Officers should *go on to do*. It is not bringing politics into the Tract Society to insist on this. You well know the energy and determination of the feeling here referred to. You have seen how rapidly it has spread within the last two years, and how great an ascendency it has gained in most of our churches. You know, also, the causes which are operating to increase and perpetuate this feeling—how long and to what extent, no one can tell."

As to the views, feelings and motives, under the influence of which they and others make this demand on the Society, these gentlemen are competent witnesses, and what they say would be received as valid testimony in any court. What they say of the acts, purposes and motives of others, is only an honest expression of their *opinions*, and is not testimony. Concerning acts performed beyond the Mississippi, which they did not witness, and concerning the motives of those who performed them, no court would allow them to testify.

What then is their testimony, on matters of which they are competent witnesses? They say, that "it is not possible to shut out from the hearts and minds" of the members of the Society, "certain events" in relation to Kansas.

Here it is necessary to recollect, that there are two conflicting accounts of those events; that given by the Republican party, which the gentlemen have stated correctly, and that of the Democratic party, which contradicts the other in important particulars. According to the Democratic statement, the Kansas-Nebraska bill was, as its own words expressly declare, not intended to legislate slavery into that territory, or out of it, but to allow the people there freely to decide the question of its exclusion or admission, according to their own wishes; that the General Government, in its whole action in relation to Kansas, has faithfully endeavored to secure to the people of that territory, that perfect freedom of decision; and that the whole difficulty in Kansas has arisen from the misconduct of the Republicans, who sent bands of armed men into Kansas, to put down freedom of choice with the bayonet and establish their own views by force. How much of truth or honesty there may be in this statement, it would be inappropriate here to affirm or inquire. However that may be, it is the avowed belief of a political party, numerous enough to elect a President of the United States, and it would be uncharitable to doubt, the actual belief of many thousands of our christian brethren who belong to and vote with that party. Which statement is true, is a question of *party politics*. The gentlemen, by giving, as true, the Republican account of these "events" and their motives, and by declaring it impossible to shut them out of the hearts and minds of the members of the Society, show conclusively that the Republican belief concerning those "events" is in their own hearts and minds, and modifies their opinions concerning the duty of the Society and its officers. Their testimony is also sufficient proof, that the demand, made "two years ago," that the Society should publish tracts against slavery, was made "under the influence" of the "feeling" which a belief of the Republican statement necessarily excites in good men who believe it; that the "judgment" in favor of publishing "tracts on the duties and evils arising out of slavery," was a judgment "so far in favor of" that feeling; and that the power which now urges the officers of the Society to publish immediately, is the same feeling—"that great sense of moral wrong," of which the Republicans assert that the Democrats are guilty.

This is the account which the gentlemen give of their *own motives*, and the motives of those with whom they are acting, in urging the officers of the Society to publish immediately, and of the state of mind in which they have interpreted the "transactions" of the Special Committee and of the Society.

"Politics," the gentlemen admit, "ought certainly to be kept out of the 'Tract Society';" and they say, that acting under the acknowledged influence of the feelings excited by their belief of the Republican account of Kansas affairs, is not bringing politics into the Society. It is only found "not possible to shut out from the hearts and minds of its members," statements concerning political events, which are affirmed by one political party and denied by another. Still, it is true, that political party views and feeling are in "the hearts and minds" of some of the members, and that "under the influence" of such feelings, this demand has been made and continues to be pressed. The influence is the same, whether it was brought in, or broke in, because it was "not possible to shut it out."

Nor are the questions in debate between the Republicans and the Democrats any the less political, because each party regards the other as guilty of "great moral wrong;" not even if one or both of them are right in that opinion. Political acts that are morally wrong are, unhappily, no new thing in the history of the world, or even in the history of our own nation. However morally wrong either party may be in the present contest, the question between them is as really political, as if it had no *moral* qualities.

It is proved beyond question, then, that party political views and feelings were in the hearts and minds of members "two years ago," demanding the publication of tracts against slavery; that the Special Committee advised, and the Society voted, that the feeling should not be gratified, any further than it could be gratified by publishing tracts on the evils arising out of slavery; and that the publication of tracts on those evils is now demanded under the influence of those same party views and feelings. "Politics," the gentlemen say, "ought certainly to be kept out of the 'Tract Society.'" But if this exclusion proves "not possible," what shall be done with the *intruder*, when it has once broken in? Shall it be allowed to govern? Must the officers of the Society obey its demands instantly?

The "judgment" of the Society, that tracts on the evils growing out of slavery ought to be published, is somewhat equivocal, to say the least, if we consider only the words in which it is expressed. But the demand prompted by political feeling, as shewn in the letter we are considering, supplies a ready commentary. It means, that tracts shall treat of moral evils and vices *as growing out of slavery*, and thus show that slavery is a bad institution, producing moral evils and vices. For instance, there are no evils more abund-

antly and vehemently charged upon slavery, than violations of the Seventh commandment. Against these evils the Society has published tracts long since, and they have long been in circulation at the South, as well as elsewhere. And so of other evils, which slavery "is known," or believed "to promote." But these tracts, though well "adapted to promote the interests of vital godliness and sound morality," by counteracting the prevalence of those evils and vices, and though they have been blessed, in numerous instances, to the reformation of the transgressor, do not satisfy the demand which party political "feeling" is now making, because they do not condemn slavery as an institution which promotes those vices. Tracts expressing or implying that condemnation of slavery, might be used with effect by the Republican party at the next election; while tracts which merely treat of the vices themselves, and which should "receive the approbation of all evangelical Christians," are not adapted to the use of such a party. No tracts that cannot be so used, will satisfy the present demand.

And here the officers of the Society find themselves in a very difficult position. What can they do? They are expressly advised by the Special Committee and by the Society, not to publish tracts on "the political aspects of slavery." They are called upon to publish tracts which shall so condemn slavery as a vice-producing institution, that they will satisfy political "feeling," and can be used for political effect. How can they steer between this prohibition on the one hand, and this demand on the other? They, at one time, hoped it might be done, by publishing a tract on "The Duties of Masters;" but they soon found, that even this would not take them safely through this narrow strait. Indeed, on a closer examination, it appears that there is actually no strait for them to pass through; no possibility of obeying the command and the prohibition both at once. Tracts on the evils and vices said to grow out of slavery, but not bearing on slavery in its political aspects, are in circulation, but do not satisfy. Tracts that will satisfy, by charging those evils and vices on slavery as their author, will bear on slavery in its political aspects. To satisfy the demand without violating the prohibition is a logical impossibility. In the present state of political parties, the prohibition fully justifies the officers of the Society in not complying with the demand.

The gentlemen have shadowed forth one other idea, which it may be well to examine. They say, of the Democratic measures in relation to Kansas, that "commencing with political movements, they have gone beyond the region of poli-

tics, and are regarded, by a vast majority of Christians at the North and West, "as great moral wrongs." The gentlemen certainly cannot mean that those measures, because they are morally wrong, are not political. They must mean, that the moral wrong of those measures is their most prominent quality; so much the most prominent, that in contemplating it, their political character and relations vanish from the mind's view and are forgotten, and we think of those acts, not as political measures, but merely "as great moral wrongs;" and this being the case, the Tract Society ought to forget or disregard their political character, and treat them "as great moral wrongs." A feeling of this kind will doubtless remain in the hearts of many, even after their understandings have seen proof that the course of the Executive officers of the Society is right. Of this view of the case, several things need to be said.

In the first place, no one thinks of carrying out this train of thought, or rather, of "feeling," to its legitimate conclusion. If the Society is to meet and resist the moral wrong done in Kansas, by the issue of tracts, those tracts ought to treat of the moral wrongs which have been committed in relation to Kansas; that is, if the Republicans are right, of "the repeal of the Missouri compromise, the invasion of Kansas by armed men for the purpose of controlling her elections, and other transactions of a like nature." But no one thinks of doing this. Instead of meeting these "great moral wrongs" with an open, direct, manly resistance, by tracts which shall condemn these very wrongs, it is only urged that tracts be published on violations of the Sabbath and other immoralities which slavery is said to promote in Virginia. A "feeling" which seeks to be gratified in such an indirect way, is for that very reason to be suspected.

In the next place, if the Society must publish to meet the "great moral wrongs" done in relation to Kansas, it needs first to consider and settle the question, what those wrongs are, and for this purpose, must settle the question, which of the two political parties has done them. However evident it may be to the Republicans, that the Democrats are in the wrong, it is equally evident to the Democrats, that the Republicans are in the wrong. To the zealous members of each of those parties, it appears impossible that the other should really and honestly believe what they profess to believe; but doubtless there are equally honest evangelical Christians on both sides. The Society cannot, without sin, throw the whole weight of its influence in favor of one of these parties and against the other, without first examining the whole subject,

and ascertaining which is *right* and which is *wrong*. And it needs to be very sure of the correctness of its decision, before it announces, as a truth to be published for the promotion of "vital godliness and sound morality," that the Republican party is *right* and the Democratic party *wrong*, or the reverse. Is it proper that the Society should undertake to be an arbiter of *such questions*, and thus entangle itself with the action of political parties?

It should be considered, too, that if the Society does this thing *once*, it must thenceforth be doing it always. Generally, there is, if we consider closely, a moral right and a moral wrong in relation to all political measures. At least, every important election turns on questions, in which many voters think they see a moral bearing, and in which their opponents seem to them to be morally wrong. This fact has stood out, more or less prominently, in almost every Presidential election in the United States. And so it will continue to be. If the Society *once begins* to decide the question between political parties, which is morally right and which morally wrong, it will never want employment of that kind. No definite line can be drawn, between wrongs which are atrocious enough to demand the interference of the Society, and those which are not. At every election, its verdict will be sought, and it will be called upon to publish tracts accordingly. Shall it enter upon such a course? And if it does, can it "deal even-handedly" with both parties?

We must remember, too, that tracts committing the Society in favor of one political party and against its rival, cannot be "calculated to receive the approbation of all evangelical Christians." A political party containing no evangelical Christians is perhaps imaginable; but no such party has ever existed, or can reasonably be expected to exist, in our country. Evangelical Christians cannot be expected to approve of tracts condemning their own party, which they believe to be morally right, and supporting its opponent, which they believe to be morally wrong; and such is almost always the belief of christian men of every party.

And, as the result of all this, the Society cannot enter upon this course without destroying its own moral influence. Now, the Society possesses a powerful and extensive moral influence, founded on its established reputation for publishing only what is demanded by the interests of "vital godliness and sound morality." The fact that it publishes against any thing, is, with the public generally, a strong presumptive evidence, that what its tracts condemn is morally wrong. It is for this reason, more than for the value of the matter which the tracts

are expected to contain, that the Society is called upon to declare itself against the Democratic party now. If it yields to that demand, it will, by that very yielding, destroy its moral influence with members of the party which it condemns. Its tracts may still circulate, and, by the force of the good matter in them, may do some good; but both their circulation and their influence over those who read them, will be greatly diminished, by the prejudice which half the nation will feel against the political course of the Society. And even among members of the favored party, the tracts will be received with the less reverence, because they come from a *Society which meddles with politics*.

And finally, by entering upon the course now demanded of it, and pursuing it, as it must if it makes a *beginning*, the character of the Society itself will be deteriorated. By the habitual attention which it will be compelled to give to matters in controversy between political parties, its mind will be drawn down from those elevating topics which have hitherto occupied it, and will be made more secular and less purely Christian, and it will become less worthy of the confidence which the world now reposes in it.

The gentlemen advance another idea. They say that the "indignant feeling" with which Republicans regard the wrongs done by the Democratic party in Kansas, "prevails widely among the churches of the North and West"; has spread rapidly within the last two years, and has gained great ascendancy "in most of our churches"; and that this "indignant feeling" "will to some extent enter into the question," and "demand that the Resolve of the Society should be carried out," as the gentlemen understand it.

This may be true, as extensively as the gentlemen suppose; or it may be true much less extensively. The exact degree of "ascendancy" which those views have gained, even among the Congregational clergy, has never yet been ascertained, and is probably much less than some zealous men suppose. Among Congregational laymen, the degree of that "ascendancy" is probably less, and certainly more doubtful, than among the clergy. Indeed, the gentlemen expressly limit this supposed "ascendancy" to "the North and West." Their logic assumes, that "the churches of the North and West" have a right to dictate the course of the Society, and that its officers ought to yield at once to *their* dictation, without regard to the views or "feelings" or the Constitutional rights of the churches of the South and South West. These last are ignored, as if they had no rights in the Society. If we include all the members of all the churches of every name

that contribute to the Society, it is not certain that those views have gained any "ascendency," even at the North; and if we include the Southern churches, as justice and the Constitution require, that great "ascendency" is not even probable, and is not asserted by the writer himself.

But if the gentlemen's estimate is correct, and if the churches ought to act accordingly, why should they limit their demand to the Tract Society? Why should they not begin at home, and "make clean the inside of the cup and platter," by compelling every one of their own members to denounce those "great moral wrongs," and to vote against them, if he be a voter. Must we not, on this principle, have church discipline for the offence of not belonging to the right political party! Must not candidates for admission be examined as to their political creed? And must not candidates for the pastoral office be required to show themselves not only sound in their political faith, but "well instructed," and "able to convince gainsayers?" Is it not as much a duty to put all these things right, as it is to put the officers of the Tract Society right? Must those officers be governed by views which are said, but not proved, to have gained great ascendency in the churches, while none of those churches are governed by those views in the management of their own affairs? The claim is absurd. But if the claim is valid; if this new position, as asserted, has been already taken by "most of our churches," and this new doctrine embraced by them, is *really true*, is it not expedient to establish a new department of instruction in our Theological Seminaries, viz. that of *political theology*, that our candidates for the pulpit may be "scribes well instructed" and qualified to meet this new demand of "most of our churches"?

This was written, with the undoubting belief, that all men could see, and would acknowledge the absurdity of such a claim. But if we may believe newspaper statements, since received, one Association of Ministers in Connecticut has already condemned the *belief, that there has been preaching enough against slavery*, as a "*practical heresy*," and has refused a license to preach the Gospel, to a candidate who was found guilty of it.

If this new dispensation of practical Christianity has actually been accepted by one clerical association in Connecticut, and so decidedly, as to be inaugurated, by the application of this *new test* of what qualifies a theological student to preach the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, should not our Seminaries, our ancient formulas of the christian faith, our creeds, catechisms, prayer-books and liturgies, be *so revised*,

as to conform to this new demand of the christian church, and of her ministry? The reasoning of the writer leads, logically and inevitably, to this result.

I am happy to learn from the letter, that while all these gentlemen concur in its "conclusion," they do not *all* concur in its "reasoning." As I am satisfied, that their *premises* are false, *their reasoning* must be invalid.

For reasons stated in this and in the previous letters, I do most emphatically dissent from their "conclusion," and protest against the officers of the Society, and the Society itself, yielding to this, or to any such, demand.

I do not doubt their sincerity, or friendliness to the Society. Yet it is possible that their "feelings" respecting "the great moral wrongs" done in Kansas, and their political relations may have, unconsciously doubtless, biased their judgment and their christian feeling. Indeed, as it seems to me, the substance, and the entire course of their argument, shows that they have. Political events in their assumed relations to religion and morals, I must say, are the staple of their letter—the starting point and the end. Their reasoning has no relevancy to the Tract Society, constituted as it is, with a specific object to promote, and limited in the means it has stipulated to employ for the promotion of that object. But their reasoning is quite relevant and forcible, for a Society formed for the express purpose of promoting morality in all its possible applications, *political or otherwise*, and for redressing all great moral wrongs perpetrated by *political parties*. The reasoning is valid for a Society having no Constitution to restrain it, except the present and ever-changing *will* of a majority of its members. But to meet the demand of the "conclusion" which the writer reaches, the American Tract Society has no right or power. The attempt to do so must sweep away its foundations, or whelm it in the vortex of ever-changing party politics.

Respectfully yours,

SETH BLISS.

Boston, March 13, 1858.

LETTER VI,

TO THE MEMBERS, PATRONS AND FRIENDS,
OF THE BOSTON SOCIETY.

CHRISTIAN FRIENDS,—As I propose to write of matters more especially concerning our own Society, and which I regard as demanding your serious consideration, I address this letter particularly to you. Many who candidly and carefully read the report of the Special Committee, and as I doubt not, the majority of those who voted to adopt it, were satisfied, that the Society could not, consistently with the advice given in that report, any more than with the prohibitions of the Constitution, publish on slavery, as some expected and had demanded. They received the same impression respecting the report, which a member of our Committee did, as he stated at one of their recent meetings. Said he, "I first read the report of the Special Committee in Paris,—away from the excitement of the occasion." "I then asked myself, what have that Committee done, but seem to advance, and then to retreat to the point from which they started; leaving the subject where they found it, in the discretion of the Publishing Committee." "My wonder then was, and still is, why there should be such diversity of opinion, when nothing was really decided by that Committee, as to publishing on slavery, different from the course the Society had always pursued." Many who read that report in similar circumstances, came to the same conclusion.

I have already stated, in previous letters, the exigency which soon arose, and which arrested the progress of the Committee, in endeavoring to realize their own hopes, as to what could be published on the subject. After long and anxious deliberation, they published their decision of the 10th of September, not to issue "Duties of Masters." I had an-

ticipated from the beginning such a result; and that when that result was known, it would disappoint some and close some pulpits in New England to our soliciting agents. Some had previously refused to give until the *first* tract on slavery was issued, and others refused until they knew none would be issued. Between these two conflicting feelings, contributions to our treasury were steadily falling off. A brief letter was addressed by the New York Secretaries, on the 15th of June, to the Southern Colporters, Superintendents and Agents, expressing their regret that a misapprehension evidently existed in many minds as to the true import of the report of the Committee of Fifteen; that it contemplated no violation of the fundamental catholic principle of the Constitution; that it enjoined on the Publishing Committee to issue only what would be consistent with "the widest and best usefulness of the Society throughout our whole country;" and asking them not to prejudge the action of the Society, but calmly and faithfully to "go on in their work of faith and labor of love."

For issuing such a letter the Secretaries have been severely censured by some. But when I have asked such to point out what there was in the paper itself, which was not proper and demanded by the circumstances, they have declined doing it. They interpreted it as an indication that no such tract on slavery as they demanded and expected would be issued. Some ministers arrayed themselves and their people at once against the Society. Others became indifferent to affording aid. Whether there was more of haste and passion in this, than of calm, christian judgment, I do not say. In regard to this, men will feel differently.

Such was the state of things in June, that it did not seem wise, financially, to reappoint our District Secretaries for the year. But the discord without our Committee room was such, that this could not be avoided, without giving offence to some, and they were reappointed.

It has been asserted, that our Executive Committee have committed themselves against the position of the Executive Committee of the New York Society, in their not issuing "Duties of Masters"; and that they did this in a resolution which they adopted on the 29th of July last. It is due to you to know the facts in this case, that you may judge for yourselves. The letter of the New York Secretaries to the Southern Colporters in June was made the occasion of bringing this subject before our Committee. This was done by no agency or advice of mine, but by the agency of one of our District Secretaries. A special meeting of our Committee

was called for this purpose, and held July 22d. The object for which that meeting was called, as stated on our Records, was "to ascertain the views of this Committee respecting the understanding of the report of the Special Committee of the New York Society as to their publishing on slavery; and what instructions or advice, if any, we should give to our Secretaries."

At that time, the Publishing Committee at New York had the question of publishing "*Duties of Masters*" still under consideration. It was for them to decide this; and not for our Committee. When they should decide what course to take, it would be time for our Committee to consider their decision, and how it would affect our interests. Besides, the question was one which, I was aware, could not fail to introduce discord into our own counsels, and this prematurely. The matter was discussed for two hours, and disclosed decidedly contrary opinions. Finally it was referred to a Committee, to report some suitable resolution to an adjourned meeting. At the adjourned meeting, July 29th, this Committee reported a preamble and resolution. After some discussion these were adopted unanimously by the seven present out of the twelve, which constitute the Committee. The vote was unanimous, because those members who were opposed to taking any action at that time, regarded the resolution as a compromise of conflicting opinions, and believed that it would so be understood generally. The following is a copy:

"Whereas, the *American Tract Society at New York* adopted, at its last Annual Meeting, a Report of a Special Committee, embracing certain Resolutions, which were understood as defining the policy of the Society upon certain subjects—

Resolved, That we heartily approve of the principles set forth in the said Resolutions; and having entire confidence in the wisdom, prudence and Christian character of the distinguished members of that Committee, and believing that the said Report was made upon full and prayerful consideration, and was adopted by the Society in all truth and sincerity, we look for the carrying out of those principles, by the Executive Committee of the said Society, *in good faith, but always and strictly within the limits of the Constitution*. And trusting that in due time those principles will be acted upon and carried out, we feel ourselves called upon to exercise—and we earnestly entreat our brethren to exercise—a spirit of Christian patience and forbearance; feeling that such a spirit will bring its own reward, in the accomplishment of greater good than can be effected by any hasty or precipitate action, and that so the work of the Lord shall prosper in our hands."

It needs no argument to prove that this decides nothing as to publishing on slavery. The compromise is in the words in italics. The whole significance and force hinges on the question, *what is good faith to the principles set forth in the*

report of the Special Committee, and what will be "the carrying out of those principles, in good faith, but *always* and *strictly* within the *limits* of the *Constitution*"? Why are those words there, if there are no grounds for doubts on this point, and if not there for the purpose of gaining a unanimity? Had they not been there, the resolution could not have been unanimously adopted. If there was no question that the recommendations of the Special Committee respecting publishing on slavery were to be followed, as some understood them and maintain, absolutely, and without regard to unforeseen circumstances, without regard to consequences, or the Constitution, or the rights of a minority of members, there was no relevance, propriety, or necessity for the significant and qualifying words, "in *good faith*, but *always* and *strictly* within the *limits* of the *Constitution*." Some men may suffer their feelings or prejudices to interpret words whose meaning in ordinary use is obvious, and thus may assume a meaning which will gratify the feelings. However this may be in this case, our Committee did, in substance, unanimously vote, that a Constitution is a *reality*, and has a definite meaning, and definite limits in its prohibitions and requirements, which the Society must always and strictly regard.

This is all the action which our Committee have taken in relation to the action of the New York Committee. It expresses no opposition to the decision which the New York Committee made in *September* following. By this you can judge of the reality of the assumed commitment of our Committee in opposition to that Committee.

What is *good faith* to the principles embodied in the resolutions of the Special Committee; and also, what is *always* and *strictly* within the *limits* of their Constitution, I have endeavored to prove in the first two of these Letters. If the reasoning is as sound and valid for you, as it is for me, you will readily decide this question.

CONTRIBUTIONS FALLING OFF.

In the circumstances which existed, from May to October, it was to be expected that there would be a decline of donations to our treasury.

When the Circular to the Southern Colporters was issued, misrepresented, as it was, by some journals, and interpreted by some individuals, as indicating that a tract on the moral duties growing out of slavery, might not be issued, some pulpits were closed to our annual appeal for funds. The Com-

mittee's Circular of September 10th, increased the embarrassments of our District Secretaries, and it was doubtful whether they would find employment for all the Sabbaths.

On the first of October, it was found, that, for the first five months of each of the three previous years, our contributions, compared with the first five months of 1854, had fallen off, in the aggregate amount, \$13,882. The decline was steadily downwards, in the ratio of 29 per cent, 38 per cent, and 59 per cent.

The next five months of the year, from Oct. 1st to March 1st, are usually the most productive. The general financial distress commenced with this period, and has, of course, affected the resources of benevolence generally. Comparing the contributions of the first ten months of each of the three years, from May 1, 1855, to March 1, 1858, with the amount received in the ten months of 1854, and the decline in the aggregate is \$19,444, and the ratio is 15, 20 and 53 per cent. The amount received the last three years is \$24,554 *less* than the amount received for the three previous years; or a falling of 30 per cent, from those three years. *Previous to 1855, the amount of contributions had steadily and annually increased for more than twenty years. The amount, in donations and legacies, given annually to this cause, from our field, had risen from \$5,185 in 1833, to more than \$36,000; and the amount from sale of publications, from \$5,886 to more than \$42,000—in 22 years. One year more of discord will carry us back to where we were 25 years ago.* These facts show the increasing potency of the cause, which has so seriously destroyed confidence, and crippled our resources.

Is there any probability, that had either Society published such tracts on slavery, two years ago, as are demanded, it would have saved us from this loss of funds, and confidence; or that if this should *now* be done, it would arrest this decline and restore confidence,—especially when we consider, that so many Northern members, as well as Southern, are opposed to such a course?

The same destructive influence is shown, in the steadily increasing per centage cost of our soliciting agencies. For several years previous to 1854, the expense of this agency ranged from 13 to 17 per cent, not including the amount received in legacies, which is not included in any of these estimates. For that year, 1854, it was about 19 per cent; 1855, 23 per cent; 1856, 29 per cent; 1857, to May 1st, 30 per cent; and for the five months, from 1st of May to October 1857, 51 per cent; and for the next five months, to March 1, 1858, 35 per cent—making the expenses of our agencies for the ten

months of this year, 43 per cent. As the Secretary usually devotes the Sabbath to visiting the churches, one half of his salary is charged, in this estimate, to the agency department.

On examining the sources from which the donations to our treasury have come, for the ten months of this year, it is found that one half the amount came from Colporter Associations, Benevolent Societies, individuals and congregations visited by the Secretary, and from those whose pastors voluntarily performed the agency. To obtain the other half, by District Secretaries, has cost 70 per cent. These facts show decidedly whither we are tending, and what must soon be the result, if the present discord continues much longer. Will not the Society be compelled wholly to dispense with soliciting agencies?

This question will certainly arise in many minds; and in view of the fact, that for many years most of the congregations within our field have been repeatedly addressed on the object and operations of the Society,—that the annual circulation of 50,000 copies of the American Messenger for many years past, in our field, is giving general information on the subject,—that the increased intelligence of the christian community more generally appreciates the importance of the work,—and in view of the fact that pastors are disposed, generally, to call the attention of their congregations to the subject, and to solicit contributions, may not *this* Society safely rely on the christian magnanimity and liberality of the pastors, churches, and individuals, with the correspondence and agency of the Secretary, and dispense with soliciting agencies, even should the former harmony of the Society be restored? As things *now* are, this seems to be necessary, or the churches will lose what confidence they may yet have in the Society. The *net* result will, I am persuaded, not be diminished by such a change.

When, on the first of October, it was found that the contributions were so seriously falling off, our Committee were embarrassed. Our District Secretaries had been appointed for the year, and, by our rules, had a right to continue through the term, and had labored faithfully in the performance of their duties.

WHAT IS THE REMEDY ?

Discord is our destruction. Harmony restored is our great want. This only can save us. Will publishing a few tracts on slavery restore peace? What hope of this by such means, when *our own members and patrons* are decidedly not agreed

that this is either lawful, or expedient? What use can be made of such tracts, and will the demand for them justify the expense? A kindred Society, in this city, has made the experiment, by publishing three premium tracts on slavery, and they are said to be very good ones. But, if I am rightly informed, the demand for them has not yet justified the expense. Can our Society be justified in publishing what will not be circulated, as all other of our publications are? To do this, would only intensify and prolong the strife over our whole field. Is there any other remedy which can restore peace and confidence but this very simple one, viz. What we cannot agree to publish, according to the stipulations of our Constitution, we can agree to leave others to publish who choose to do so.

It is known that some are expecting such a change in the present administration of this Society next May, as shall secure the issuing of such tracts, and that our relations to the National Society will be sundered. This will not be difficult, provided our Society so decide at our next annual meeting, or at any other time. This relation is voluntary, and optional with both parties. The connection has proved, for thirty-three years, mutually useful, convenient and honorable to both parties, as well as highly advantageous to the cause generally. In an experience, for twenty-five years, of constant intercourse with that Society, I have not known of even a ripple, to disturb the peaceful waters on which we have together labored to advance our common cause. Our Committee have never requested a favor of them, which they did not promptly and fully grant, nor propose for their consideration any subject of mutual interest, or any thing that we judged important for our own interests, or for the common cause, to which they did not cordially respond, so far as in their power. Their treatment of us has uniformly been honorable, liberal and magnanimous. Can it be expected, that honorable and christian men, will consent to sunder such a relation for a doubtful experiment, or without good and sufficient reasons?

There is one subject relating to this question which has, probably, influenced some minds in contemplating the dissolution of this relation. At our annual meeting, 1856, in answer to inquiries respecting the nature and extent of our connection with the National Society, this was explained, as being that of two kindred Societies, each independent, and each existing under independent corporate powers, but mutually and courteously coöperating, in christian confidence, for the greater benefit of a common cause. After this explanation, as the Records state;

"By request of Rev. R. S. Storrs, D. D., the Rev. H. M. Dexter offered the following resolutions, which were adopted:

"*Whereas* The Executive Committee of the American Tract Society at New York, at its recent anniversary, declared that "there are certain aspects of the subject of slavery, and of the duties and evils connected with it, in which it might be hoped that evangelical Christians, North and South, would agree," therefore,

"*Resolved*, That, in our opinion, the Executive Committee of said Society will be only meeting the wishes of their supporters, the exigencies of the times, and the high demands of Christian duty, in the practical adoption of this declaration, and in the speedy publication of tracts which shall bear upon this as upon other sins.

"*Whereas* The American Tract Society at Boston is historically the Parent Tract Society of this country, having existed eleven years prior to the organization of the American Tract Society at New York; and whereas—embracing the chief Christian elements of the four New England States—it has a deep interest in, and should exert a powerful influence upon the measures adopted for the publication and distribution of a religious literature; and whereas the matter of the publication of tracts and books is now wholly in the hands of the Society at New York; and whereas, although there is no organic connection between these two Societies, the operations of the Society at New York are sustained largely by the funds of the Society at Boston; therefore

"*Resolved*, That the Executive Committee of this Society be and hereby are, instructed to confer with that of the Society at New York, and endeavor to effect such an arrangement, that the Congregationalist member of the New York Publishing Committee shall hereafter be nominated by this Society, and report the result of their conference at the next annual meeting of this body, or at a special meeting to be duly called for that purpose."

This was done just before the adjournment, and without discussion or inquiry. In the choice of the officers, previous to the adoption of the resolution, ninety-nine ballots were cast; a larger number of members voted than had attended any previous annual meeting for business for more than twenty-five years, and by eight or ten times.

The preamble states one reason for the resolution which I wish was true to a much greater extent, viz. "the operations of the Society at New York are sustained largely by the funds of the Society at Boston." Whereas the facts are, the contributions to that Society *last year* from the Middle and Southern States was over \$100,000, from the Eastern and Western States less than half this sum. The Episcopal churches of New York City gave \$10,000, and the Reformed Dutch gave so liberally, that these two branches of the Christian Church alone, gave to the National Society more than Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and Massachusetts.

During *four years* from 1853 to 1857, South Carolina gave to the National Society \$13,318, Virginia \$28,822, North Carolina \$7,217, Georgia \$8,445, Louisiana \$3,733, and Mis-

Mississippi \$3,954. Total, in four years, from these six Southern and South Western States, \$65,489.

For the same years, Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont gave to our Society \$27,796, and about \$1,500 directly to the National Society. Total, \$28,296.

The City of New York, alone, in the same four years, contributed to the National Society \$114,694, and the State, exclusive of the City, \$128,430,—City and State together, in four years, \$242,124. From Massachusetts we have received \$92,777, besides some \$6,000 paid directly to the National Society:—total from Massachusetts, in the four years, \$98,777. In all these estimates legacies are included, and the fractions are omitted.

The total amount to this cause, in the *four years*, from the field of our Society, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont, including what was contributed directly to the National Society, is \$122,817,—or about one half of the amount which the State and City of New York paid to that Society in the same period.

Last year, to April 1857, the donations and legacies to the National Society were, from the *Slave States* about \$27,000; Ohio and North Western States, \$25,873; and from the *six* New England States, \$25,580; New York, Pennsylvania and New Jersey, \$78,886. These facts do not furnish our Society any claim in equity for a controlling voice on the ground assumed in the preamble to the resolution.

This resolution was duly communicated to the Executive Committee of the New York Society, and their attention to it respectfully solicited,—and they returned the following answer:

“At the stated meeting of the Executive Committee of the American Tract Society, New York, March 16, 1857, a communication was received from the Executive Committee of the American Tract Society at Boston, enclosing a resolution of that Society, instructing them to endeavor to effect such an arrangement, that the Congregationalist member of the Publishing Committee of this Society shall hereafter be nominated by the American Tract Society at Boston.

“The Committee, having given the subject the attention due to their esteemed brethren, the Committee and members of the American Tract Society at Boston, who have cordially, harmoniously, and efficiently coöperated with this Society for thirty-two years from the time of its formation, were unanimously agreed that such an arrangement with any institution or body extraneous to this Society, for the election of a member of the Publishing Committee, from whatever ecclesiastical communion or denomination, would be at variance with the Constitution of this Society, and with the free action of the Board of Directors in electing that Committee.

A true copy from the Minutes.

JOHN KNOX, *Chairman.*
WM. A. HALLOCK, *Cor. Sec.*

New York, March 17, 1857.”

When this communication was first read in our Committee, it led to no discussion; and as their objection to granting the request is a constitutional one, all present seemed to consider that the matter must end there, and that we could not, with any propriety, press the matter any farther. But not so, at our last annual meeting. When the letter was read, some members were not satisfied, and after some discussion it was laid on the table for further consideration. Subsequently, the subject was resumed, and the following action taken, as stated on the Records of the meeting:

"The discussion on the relations of this Society to the composition of the Publishing Committee of the New York Society, was resumed. Rev. C. Cushing offered the following resolution:

"Whereas it was understood by those who were active in effecting the Union between this Society and the American Tract Society in New York, as happily set forth in a brief History of this Society and its relations to the Society in New York, recently published by this Society, (p. 41,) that the wishes of the Society in Boston would be duly regarded in the election of their Publishing Committee,—

"Therefore, we would respectfully suggest to the New York Society, that it would meet our wishes should they elect, annually, one of the members of their Publishing Committee from the Executive Committee of this Society; and that a copy of this vote be forwarded to the Board of Directors of the Society in New York."

"This resolution was discussed by several members, and several amendments were proposed. Pending its consideration, on motion of Rev. H. M. Dexter, the Society voted to adjourn to meet in this place on Tuesday, at 9 o'clock, A. M."

At the adjourned meeting, on the next day, the resolution was adopted.

The following is the statement to which the mover referred:

"It was understood by those who were active in effecting the union, that the wishes of the Society at Boston, whose operations, at that time, were more extensive than those of all the other Tract Societies in the country united, would be duly regarded in the annual election of the Publishing Committee. At the formation of the Society in New York, three weeks before the Union was consummated, the Board of Directors elected Dr. Edwards, who was then the Secretary of the Boston Society and a member of its Committee, as one of the Publishing Committee of the National Society. It is also known to be a fact, though not a matter of record, that when, in 1829, Dr. Edwards, having engaged in his temperance agency, resigned his place in the Publishing Committee, the Secretary at New York communicated with the Secretary at Boston; and it was mutually understood, that the election of Rev. Samuel Greene would be acceptable to the Boston Committee. The same course was pursued in 1834, on the death of Mr. Greene, in reference to the election of Rev. Dr. Fay, who resigned in 1839, and Dr. Edwards was re-elected. In 1853 the same course was pursued, in reference to the election of Dr. Adams; and this Society has reason to expect the con-

tinuance of such courtesy and Christian confidence, as a means of perpetuating the harmony which has thus far happily existed between these two affiliated Institutions."

In the discussion, the mover laid stress on the words "duly regarded." These occur in the above historical sketch. They are not found in any written agreement between the Societies. All they mean is, that a courteous and deferential respect would be cherished toward this Society, whenever, in consequence of death, or resignation, they should have occasion to elect another Congregationalist member.

The National Society has held thirty-two elections, since the union of the two Societies was consummated. In only three instances, out of thirty-two, have they conferred with our Committee, or asked our approbation, in the election of the Congregationalist member. They have taken it for granted, that so long as his christian character and ecclesiastical standing were good among his own brethren, and he was in sympathy with the catholic spirit of the Society, and his evangelical views and piety were in harmony with it, he was a competent and suitable man to serve on their Publishing Committee, until his removal by death, or resignation.

But the *principle* on which this claim is *now* urged, was definitely settled at the organization of the National Society. It will be recollected that, as stated in the first of these letters, early in the winter of 1825, as soon as this Society had decided not to be removed to New York, and the gentlemen there had decided upon forming a similar Society in that City, our Committee sent Mr. Hallock, then our Assistant Secretary, to New York, to confer with and aid those brethren in organizing the new Society. He remained there until the preliminary organization, March 11th, when he was chosen its Secretary. This organization, with its Constitution, officers, etc., was made subject to the revision of the Convention which was to meet May 10th. In this interim of two months, nothing was done but to perfect the arrangements for the action of the Convention, and to prepare for active operations, as soon as the organization should be consummated by the Convention. Mr. Hallock, having returned to his labors for the Boston Society, as a means of facilitating the union of the two Institutions, wrote from Andover to the Executive Committee which had been appointed at New York, proposing that they should recommend the insertion in their Constitution of a clause giving authority for our Society, composed at that time exclusively of members of the Congregational body, to *nominate* the Congregationalist member. At their first meeting this arrangement was assented to, but before

any further action was taken, another meeting was held, at which there appeared insuperable obstacles to such an arrangement. I copy the minute of both meetings from their Records. The first meeting was held April 20, 1825. Eight of the thirteen members were present.

“Resolved, That a Committee be appointed to address a letter to the Committee of the American Tract Society, at Boston, informing them, that this Committee will use their influence to obtain the insertion of a provision in the Constitution, conferring upon the Society at Boston, the power of appointing a member of the Publishing Committee. Dr. Knox dissented and voted in the negative.”

Twenty days after this, May 9th, they met again, and this subject was called up. Thirteen members were present, and among them Rev. Drs. Milnor and Spring, who were not at the previous meeting. They united with Dr. Knox, and moved a reconsideration of the former vote, which they urged on the ground—as stated by those who took part in the Committee—that the design was to form a Society, not of denominations, or of clergymen, or laymen, exclusively, but simply of all such evangelical Christians of every name, lay or clerical, as chose to unite for the object proposed; and that if they gave this power to one denomination or body, outside of the Society, they could not refuse to do it for another. If they should adopt such a principle, the power to control the Society and maintain its independence would pass from their own hands, and it would be liable to be made the arena for the discussion and arbitrament of ecclesiastical and denominational differences. These reasons prevailed, and the following minute is found on the Records of this meeting:

“On motion, it was Resolved, To reconsider the vote of the last meeting.”

“Resolved, That it is inexpedient to recommend the alteration of the Constitution, as proposed at the last meeting of this Committee.”

This settles the question. The National Society has refused, from the beginning, to bind itself to appoint a Congregationalist member of their Publishing Committee on the nomination of this Society, or indeed to bind itself to appoint any Congregationalist member at all. Their answer, already quoted, was the only answer which they were at liberty to give.

It was also assumed, in the discussion of this subject, that the National Society had, uniformly, in electing a Congrega-

tionalist member of their Publishing Committee, elected one who, *at the time*, was a member of our Executive Committee. But the facts in the case, as the Records show, are, that for thirty-three years, the members whom they elected, were, *at the same time*, members of our Executive Committee only *eight years*; so that usage is against the claim, as twenty-five to eight.

It is probable that, had these facts been inquired for and considered, Mr. Cushing's resolution would not have been adopted.

Immediately on the adoption of the resolution, another relating to the same discordant subject was introduced, and stands on our Records, viz :

"Rev. A. L. Stone offered the following :

"*Resolved*, That this Society recommend to the churches in our field, contributing to the cause of Tract Distribution, so to order the disposal of their funds, as to constitute, as far as possible, pastors and members of New England churches, Life Directors of the American Tract Society at New York."

"This resolution led to a discussion, which was arrested by a proposition of the mover to lay it upon the table indefinitely, and which was unanimously agreed to."

The mover consented to this, with the understanding that the resolution should be recorded with the proceedings of the meeting, as the discussion, record, etc., would secure attention to it. The *animus* of this, and of the previous resolution, was too apparent to be mistaken, and constrained a lay member to ask, during the discussion of the resolution, "as we have struck the victim twice, why should we strike the third time?" As membership in one Society does not carry with it the right to vote in the other, the mover's object was, to make members of the National Society, by funds contributed "in our field," who would be expected to vote right on their platform. Indeed, this was frankly avowed. But should such a question be suffered to influence honorable and christian men, so as to alienate brethren, and rupture the harmonious and useful relations of the two Societies? Will it honor our common Master, or promote his kingdom? The measure of christian union to which we had attained, we have acknowledged in our Constitution, and by this we have labored harmoniously and usefully together, in this Society, for nearly half a century. Let us agree "to walk by the same rule, and mind the same things," avoiding questions of irritation and strife, and all doubtful disputations, till our brief work on earth is done, and we are transferred to a more perfect union, in "the General Assembly and Church of the First born," "of all nations, kindred, people and tongues" in Heaven.

THE NEXT ANNUAL MEETING OF OUR SOCIETY.

This will be held on Monday, May 24th. The day is fixed by the Constitution. For three years past the hour has been 12 o'clock, M., because it was found that that hour was the only available one for members to attend, as several other Societies held their business meetings in the P. M. As this hour is too early to accommodate distant members, that part of the business can be done concerning which there is usually no diversity of opinion, and it may be thought best that the meeting be adjourned to the next morning. Perhaps, too, it may be wise, that a Committee should be appointed on Monday, for the purpose of considering and reporting to the adjourned meeting, what it may be thought wise to have done, in order to restore harmony and peace. Our circumstances are such that we shall need to meet in a fraternal and prayerful spirit, and of mutual confidence, with elevated views of the glory of our redeeming God and Saviour, the glory of his mediatorial reign, our personal responsibilities to his Church, the worth and the danger of the souls of men, and their perishing need of the grace and salvation, which he only can give,—as of infinitely more importance than to achieve a party victory, at the expense of grieving our brethren and Him, by whom, notwithstanding temporary differences, all who love Him are equally loved by Him. To avoid the unpleasant scenes of the last two meetings, we shall need much of His wisdom, patience and kindness, and be ready to make sacrifices of personal feelings for the common cause.

There seems to be but one alternative; either to have our future annual meetings scenes of fraternal strife and party heat, or agree to drop the bone of contention; and return to our former united and peaceful path, and together labor for the promotion of the work for which our fathers originally united, and by the means which they agreed to employ. Continued contention will soon prove suicidal. The devil has never been cast out by contention; but from the presence of holy fraternal love, he must flee. If we cannot agree to do this, then we may be forced to another alternative. The minority may retire and leave the Society in the control of the majority; that is, in the control of the party which happens to have a majority of that meeting,—which may, or may not, truly represent the feelings of a majority of all the members. In this case, it will strike many minds as equitable, that the property of the Society should be equitably divided. The property consists of real estate,—of a building fund, which has been

accumulated in the last ten years, but not from the regular contributions;—and our stock of publications, etc.; the whole estimated to be worth from \$30,000 to \$40,000. But in what proportion shall this be divided? Equally, when one party may be twice as numerous as the other? In proportion to the votes at the annual meeting, when the proportion of all the voters may be very different? There can be no *equitable* division, without a census and canvassing of all who have a right to vote.

But there will be other and more serious difficulties in the way of an equitable division. Besides the property I have named, the Society holds one fund, *as a Trustee*, under a decree of the Supreme Court of Massachusetts, and another fund, *as a Trustee*, under a decree of the Supreme Court of Georgia. Other portions of its property it holds under wills, subject to the supervision of the Supreme Court of this State. These Trusteeships are in their very nature incapable of *division*. Nor, even if one party should retire, and leave the charter and corporate powers of the Society with the other without a law-suit, is it *certain* that these trusts would continue to be holden by the party which retains the charter. The Supreme Court may be of the opinion, that the Society has so far changed its character as to be no longer a *fit* Trustee, and may, for that reason, transfer the trust to some body already existing, or to be created for the express purpose of holding it; or the funds may revert to the heirs of the donors.

It would be very unhappy for such a Society to be a party in such litigation. Whether it must or not, may not depend on the choice of *any man*, or *body of men*. It may be the unavoidable official duty of some person, or persons, in Massachusetts, in New York, in Georgia, or elsewhere, to bring the question before the proper legal tribunal, which may, in one case, be the Supreme Court in Georgia, with an appeal to the Supreme Court of the United States. Some of the questions to be decided may be very difficult, and the decision very uncertain.

To all the evils and dangers of such litigation, the Society must expose itself, by any serious departure from its former policy, and especially by any change which a *respectable portion of its members regard as unconstitutional and morally wrong*.

If the Society slides into the hands of one party, and embarks on the bitter waters of the slavery controversy, it will not long continue in connection with the National Society; for such a course will itself constrain that Society to withdraw from the connection, and to favor the formation of a new So-

ciety, auxiliary to it, with its Depository and Agency in Boston, from which supplies of the publications of the National Society will go forth. The two opposite and rival agencies will seek to carry their respective appeals over our present field into the churches, and array, not only the churches, but often the members of the same church, into conflicting parties. If those members who wish the Society to continue as it has hitherto been, are found in the minority, they will not fail to rally to the new Society; if those who seek a change are a majority, and retain the old organization, that majority will probably consist chiefly of Congregationalist members, while the Episcopal, and many of the Baptist members will rally to the other. If such should prove to be the case, it is not difficult to see, that the old Society can easily, and will, at no distant day, be merged in the "Congregational Board of Publication."

The issues involved in the questions which will meet us, Brethren, at our annual meeting, are serious, important, and far reaching. They may involve consequences beyond human sagacity to foresee, and may prove too vast for human power to control or human wisdom to remedy. Should we not all meet, at our annual festival, in the spirit of wisdom and of a sound, sober judgment, and in the large hearted benevolence and compassion of the Master, whose disciples and Trustees we are, for *all* races, classes and conditions, of mankind.

Whether my service for you will close, or not, with the present year, I leave with you this honest testimony of my judgment, as to what is true, and just, wise, and expedient. This question of shorter or longer service, will, at a day not distant, be decided by causes, beyond the control of either of us. Nor is the day very distant when we shall all have gone the way whither our Fathers have gone, and in the brighter light of a better world, shall review, with them, the results of the trust which we received from their hands.

Respectfully yours,

SETH BLISS.

Boston, March 18, 1858.